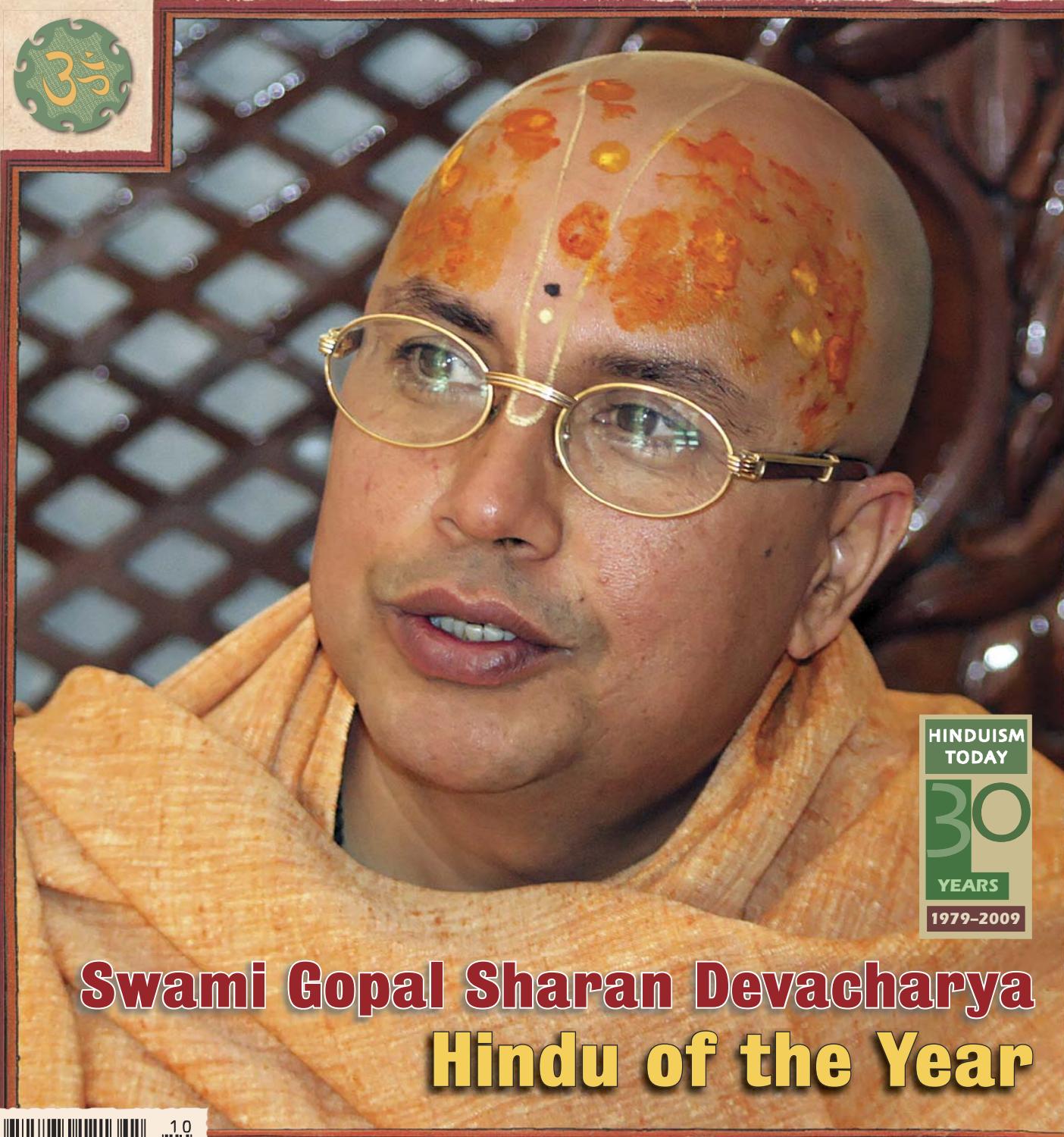


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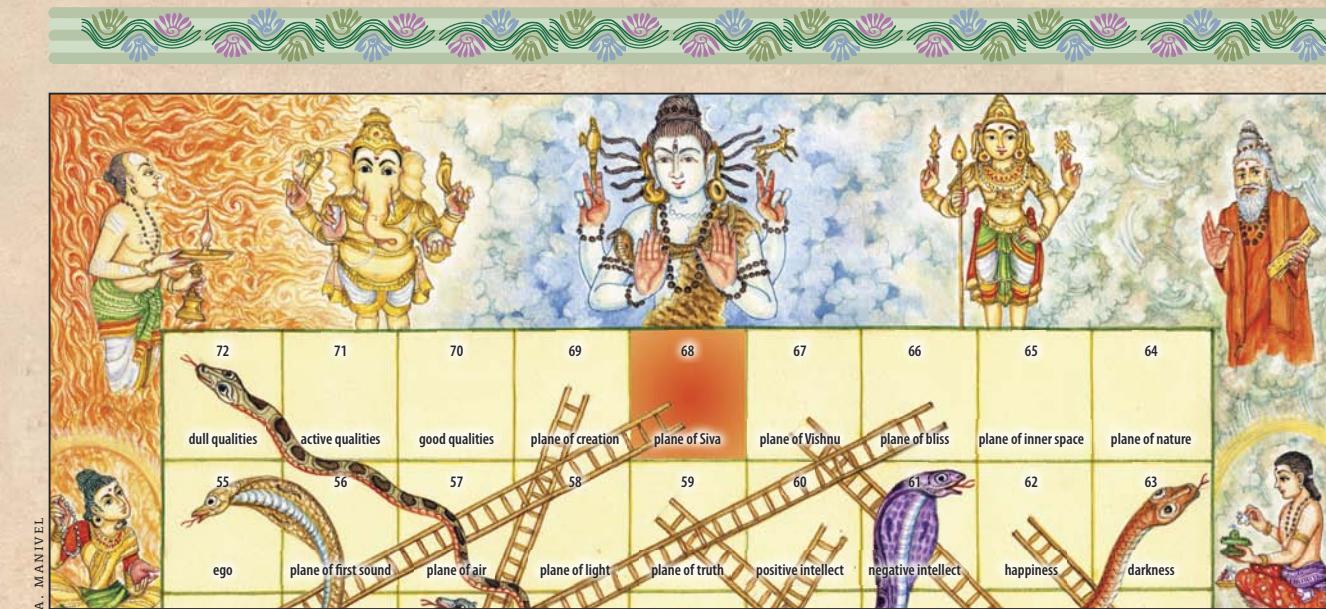


Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharya Hindu of the Year

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30
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1979-2009

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10

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Singapore . . . SGD 10Trinidad TTD 48
UK GBP 5

COVER: Swami's bold tilak includes the traditional Vaishnava mark, a black bindu for Krishna, a white one for Radha and sandalwood paste, symbolizing many blessings; (above) a portion of the Indian Game of Knowledge, known in the West as Snakes and Ladders

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2009 • HINDU YEAR 5111
VIRODHIN, THE YEAR OF ADVERSITIES

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Earthy Mysticism

HONORING THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY

MOTHER
GODDESS
PEEPUL TREE

SACRED
GRAMADEVATA
WORSHIP
PROTECTION
VILLAGE DEITY

In our Educational Insight (page 54), we take a journey into traditional village life in India, with text and photos by Dr. Stephen Hyler. The 16-page feature, “Honoring the Spirit of Community,” explores how villagers honor and invoke celestial beings for protection and prosperity, expressing undimmed awareness of the inner world of nature spirits, devas and Gods. In the stunning photo at left, women in Uchhapur, Orissa, paint sacred designs on the earthen walls and floors of their home in preparation for puja to Lakshmi, the Goddess of Abundance, inviting Her to bless and abide in the dwelling.

Welcome TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

Bodhinatha Veylanswami

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GLOBAL DHARMA

USA

Parents Settle Court Case

THE CALIFORNIA PARENTS FOR the Equalization of Educational Materials (CAPEEM), an organization of Hindu-American parents, sued the California State Board of Education to challenge the Board's 2005 textbook adoption procedure. Its 2006 lawsuit charged that "the textbooks indoctrinate children with Abrahamic religions ... while treating Hinduism in a derogatory manner. The board failed to provide equal opportunities and



Hindus plead their case before the California Curriculum Commission

UK

UK Chaplain Rallies Hindu Armed Forces

IN APRIL, 2009, U.K. ARMED forces chaplain Lieutenant Colonel Acharya Krishan Kant Attri organized a conference of Hindu soldiers. He says, "I minister to the Hindus of all three branches, Army, Navy and Air Force. But servicemen in the different branches hardly ever meet. Hindu soldiers are scattered all over the country and some are serving abroad. This conference brought us together to share feelings and experiences. I also invited Muslim, Sikhs and Christians to find our common ground and discuss common issues."



Hindu soldiers and Military chaplains in Birmingham

treat and welcome people from other faiths."

"We want soldiers to understand the nature of their duty. Some people think that soldiers

SPAIN

Lakshmi Displayed in Burger Ad

"THE SNACK THAT IS SACRED" reads Burger King's Spanish advertisement portraying Goddess Lakshmi seated behind a meat sandwich and two pastries. In July the Hindu American Foundation and its supporters wrote to the company, citing the ad as offensive to Hindus.

"Burger King Corporation values and respects all of its guests as well as the communities we serve...[the advertisement] was not intended to offend anyone," stated Denise Wilson, a Senior Communications Analyst for Burger King in a written press statement. "Out of respect for the Hindu community, the in-store advertisement has been removed from the restaurants." It was Burger King's third marketing blunder this year after having to remove an

overtly sexual ad in Singapore and an ad in Europe that used the Mexican flag.



are killing machines, which is wrong. Soldiers are trying to protect innocent people from cruel enemies as our holy Gita guides us."

included Armed Forces Chaplaincy Heads, Major General Rutledge, Lord King of West Bromwich. Speakers encouraged delegates by elucidating the value and role of the armed forces.

Assistant Chaplain General Rev. Peter Eagles gave a brief history of the multi-faith chaplaincy, noting that in the last four years chaplains for all major faiths had been accepted. He explained that the chaplain's role is to meet the needs of people from different faiths, providing appropriate spiritual guidance, while drawing strength from one another.

The UK military chaplaincy is a pre-eminent model of interfaith leadership, showing us with real action how to get along in a multi-faith society.

NEW ZEALAND

Next Generation Dynamism

THE HINDU YOUTH FOUNDATION organized the first New Zealand Hindu Youth Conference at the Hindu Heritage Centre, Auckland on May 2, 2009. Its theme was "Living in Modern New Zealand with Traditional Values." Invited guests and dignitaries included Swami Vigyanan, Maori elder Haare Williams, six members of parliament and other adult Hindu community leaders and elders who all offered encouragement to the 130 delegates.

Conference coordinator Ms. Pritika Sharma described the conference as a first step to building a stronger and more dynamic youth network based

on principles of the Hindu civilization.

Speeches given by youth leaders Meena Lakshmanan, Nitika Sharma and Deepal Singh were well received. Meena said youth are the life force, strength and wealth of a nation. "When you study the nature of a young mind, you will discover a born rebel, born revolutionary or born reformer, sometimes all rolled into one!" While citing statistics showing the success of the country's Hindu youth in academics and business, Nitika encouraged attendees to be confident, comfortable and proud of their cultural heritage.

Deepal Singh discussed the stages of integration for new arrivals to the burgeoning community: fear of the unknown, excitement of being in a new



The Honorable Pansy Wong, Minister for Ethnic Affairs and Women's Affairs; Pritika Sharma, conference coordinator; and Nitika Sharma, keynote speaker

world, homesickness, adjusting, then participating and entering into the shared culture. Other workshop topics were: bullying,

mental health, the well-being of Hindu youth, youth leadership, and the integration of Hindu and New Zealand cultures.

conservatives.

The case was led by the Naz Foundation India Trust, which filed a public interest suit in the Delhi High Court in 2001, seeking legalization of same sex relations between consenting adults based on the need to control the AIDS epidemic. After years of

INDIA

Gays Are Now Legal In India

THE INDIAN PENAL CODE (IPC) was drafted in 1860 by Lord Macaulay as a part of the effort to regulate and control Britain's Indian subjects. Section 377 of that code was devised to criminalise and prevent homosexual associations. It was an offense punishable by imprisonment for ten years or life and also liable to fines. Today, the law is rarely enforced. There have been no convictions in twenty years. Still, in modern India, most members of all religious communities, including Hindus, hold puritanical views of sexuality. These attitudes in concert with the law have made India's gay community one of the most abused, marginalized and AIDS-vulnerable gay minorities in the world.

In an historic judgment on July 2, 2009, with the country openly polarized for and against the law, the High Court of Delhi revised Section 377 to decriminalize same-sex relations between consenting adults in India.

The law continues to apply to sex involving minors and coercive sex. The jubilation of India's gay community resounded across the globe, alongside protests against the ruling by Indian



After two centuries of abuse and oppression India's gay community can now raise the Rainbow Flag, international symbol for gay pride

debate, and with many senior leaders still opposed, the High Court made its ruling, saying in part, "If there is one constitutional tenet that can be said to be the underlying theme of the Indian Constitution, it is that of 'inclusiveness.' Where society can display inclusiveness and understanding, such persons can be assured of a life of dignity and non-discrimination."



A qualified yoga teacher should have a thorough training in anatomy and the injury-free forms of all hatha yoga poses

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION/CAPEEM/ACHARYA KRISHAN KANT ATTRI



Now gilded and glowing in the sun, the capstone of Iraivan Temple's Rajagopuram weighs six tons. It took six man-years to carve.

HAWAII

Stone Temple Gold-Leafed

IN JUNE, 2009, THE ALL HAND-carved stone Iraivan Temple on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, had its tower tops gilded with 23.75-karat gold. The capstones of the central sanctum, main entry tower and three smaller side towers all now shine with an other-worldly sparkle in the tropical sun. Visitors are awestruck, saying that it is simply not possible to do justice to the sight with a photograph.

Of course, putting gold on Hindu temple towers is nothing new, but what is unique about Iraivan is that instead of covering the stone work with gold on a thick layer of copper plating, which obscures the intricate carving, the stone itself was gilded using the gold leaf process. This not only reduces

the amount of gold required, but results in a spectacular finish.

The US's foremost gilders, the world-renowned Gilder's Studio, were contracted for the job (see www.gilders.com.) Prior to coming to Hawaii, they conducted extensive tests on white granite specimens from the temple in order to determine the precise chemical requirements to ensure super bonding of the gold leaf to the stone. The Maryland-based team spent a month in Hawaii on the job. They meticulously pressure washed the towers, applied several priming coats, then "sizing" (sticky varnish) and finally the gold leaf. Lord Siva's home in Hawaii now beams with a darshan of supernatural divine brightness, blessing and uplifting all who come.

Vegetarians also got notably fewer cases of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and cancers of the stomach or bladder. Fish eaters fell somewhere between those two groups. But cancer of the bowel, one of the most common forms, did not show this reduction for vegetarians.



Avoiding red meat may save your life in the long run

BRIEFLY...

ELEPHANTS ARE NEEDED FOR U.S.

Hindu weddings. A retired Texas circus elephant is rented out by its owner for weddings as far away as New Jersey, New York and the DC area and has even crossed the border into Canada to lead a procession.

THE LOST COAST BREWERY HAD printed Lord Ganesha's image on the label of their Indica Pale Ale beer, depicting Him holding one bottle of beer in one of his four hands and

another in his trunk. After receiving complaints from around the globe, they promptly removed it and apologized.

“IN SEARCH OF SHELTER: MAPPING

the Effects of Climate Change on Human Migration and Displacement” a recent report released in Bonn, Germany, says ongoing melting of the glaciers will devastate heavily irrigated farmlands of Asia by increasing floods and decreasing long-term water supplies. The glacier-fed

basins of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong, Yangtze and Yellow rivers now support over 1.4 billion people in India, Pakistan, China, Bangladesh and neighboring countries. The report warns that changes in the rivers and livelihoods dependent on them could bring profound economic, cultural and demographic impacts.

SANSKRIT STUDIES ARE RISING among urban youth and techies who are increasingly interested in the ancient language. They are attracted by Sanskrit's highly logical grammatical structure. It also opens doors to

classics like the *Vedas* and the *Bhagavad Gita* and Sanskrit texts on ayurveda and yoga. For students of ethics, leadership and strategy, there is nothing like reading the *Arthashastra* in the original. And, for Hindus, it's all about claiming one's heritage.

THE HINDU WORD KARMA HAS

always been the most popular Sanskrit addition to the English language. Now it has incarnated in the automobile world as an electric hybrid, the Fisker Karma, touted as good karma since it gets 100 miles per gallon and gives you a cleaner conscience. “Look at my car, Ma. It’s a Karma!”

U K

Massive UK Study Shows Meat is Risky

A 12-YEAR STUDY PUBLISHED in the July *British Journal of Cancer* suggests that vegetarians are generally less likely than meat eaters to develop cancer, though this does not apply to all forms of the disease.

The study followed 61,566 British men and women of three categories: meat-eaters, those who eat fish but not meat, and those who eat neither meat nor fish. Vegetarians were approximately half as likely as meat-eaters to develop cancers of the lymph or the blood, about one-third as likely to develop stomach cancers, and 75% less likely to develop multiple myeloma, a relatively rare cancer of the bone marrow.

Vegetarians also got notably fewer cases of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and cancers of the stomach or bladder. Fish eaters fell somewhere between those two groups. But cancer of the bowel, one of the most common forms, did not show this reduction for vegetarians.

Professor Tim Key, the lead author, cautions that it is impossible to draw strong conclusions from this single study. Researchers stress that more studies are needed and that people should continue to eat a healthy, balanced diet high in fibre, fruit and vegetables and low in saturated fat, salt and red and processed meat (savvy Hindus will pass on the red meat.)



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this seva by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

Much Ado About Christmas

Ways you can reduce the influence of Yuletide and appropriately enjoy the holidays with your family

BY VIDYA MANO哈尔

EVERY YEAR THE WESTERN holiday season descends upon us full force. From catchy Christmas jingles to city decorations, the impact is felt everywhere. Images of the latest gadgets neatly gift-wrapped and happy kids with pricey new toys constantly flash by on TV while seductive voices urge us to spend more. The temptation is hard to resist, especially for our Hindu children, whose friends are eagerly anticipating the big day. Our kids have an ever-growing list of wants: a Christmas tree with ornaments, visits to mall Santas, toys and more toys. Many of us buy gifts for our co-workers, friends, relatives and our children's teachers, either willingly or to keep up with our colleagues and neighbors. We receive Christmas cards and feel obliged to return the favor. Many Hindus feel compelled to host Christmas parties to fit in with their social circles. For many Hindus in America it is fashionable to celebrate Christmas.

What impact is this having on us? Perhaps we can argue that the mere celebration of Christmas does not make us leave our Hindu ways to embrace Christianity, but this may be true only for those of us who were brought up in India and have a good grounding in our religion. For children born and raised in the West we cannot take this for granted. Many Hindu children living in the USA already feel embarrassed or confused by their religion to some degree, and they have trouble reconciling the cultural differences they see between their family life and their social life. By encouraging Christmas celebrations we might be inadvertently encouraging our children to leave behind their Hindu heritage more than we think.

How do Hindu parents strike a balance, enjoying the Western holiday season without jeopardizing our own cultural and religious values? Here are some ideas.

Go on a vacation. Winter is a good time to visit India. You cannot escape Christmas in big cities like Mumbai, but in



small towns and rural areas the impact is minuscule. Visiting temples in India is always a festive experience. If you cannot afford to go to India, opt for somewhere in the USA. Be careful not to select commercialized vacation spots like Disney World, where Christmas will be observed. Choose destinations that emphasize nature or history, such as beach or ski resorts, national parks and monuments, and historical sites. Stay with like-minded friends or relatives for a week. If your hosts aren't focused on Christmas, neither will your children be.

Spend quality time with your children. If you prefer to stay home, there are many ways to spend the holidays without giving in to the bustle. Visit a museum, park or zoo. Start and finish a project. Spend time on a shared hobby. Teach them new skills. Watch movies together. Teach your kids how to cook fun dishes they enjoy. Volunteer for a charity; there are many to choose from.

Arrange and attend Hindu religious ceremonies and gatherings. Visit local temples with your kids. Talk to them about Hinduism, explain how it differs from Christianity and point out that Jews and Muslims do not celebrate Christmas either. Perform a grand puja at home. Celebrate the Pancha Ganapati festival, which is described in the book *Loving Ganesha* by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami.

Downplay the commercialization. Demonstrate to your children that you do not buy in to the spending frenzy. Do not feel compelled to buy a gift for each person who gives you one. Find other creative ways to return the kindness. If your child is pinning for those hot roller skates, buy them but store them away to be given during a Hindu holiday. Be firm and reasonable; do not give in to the pressure.

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The Three Stages of Faith

We progress from blind faith to conviction bolstered by philosophy, and finally to certainty forged in the fires of personal experience

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

FAITH IS CENTRAL TO ALL THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS. Webster's dictionary defines religious faith as unquestioning belief in God and religious tenets that does not require proof or evidence. The Hindu view of faith is somewhat different. This is because in Hinduism faith is not a static state; rather, it is constantly deepening through personal experience and growth. The spiritual truths of Sanatana Dharma, initially accepted without proof, are ultimately proved through personal experience. Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmaya Mission, succinctly conveyed this concept: "Faith is to believe what you do not see. The reward of faith is to see what you believed."

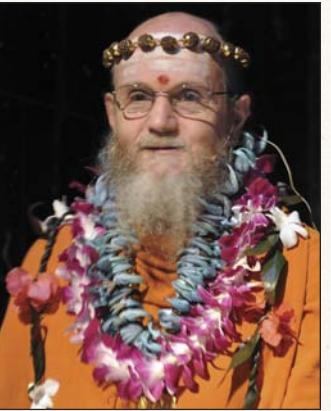
My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, presents this deeper aspect of faith by citing an old saying favored by pragmatic intellectuals, "Seeing is believing," and then states that a more profound adage is "Believing is seeing." He goes on to explain that today's scientists and educators see with their two eyes and pass judgments based on what they currently believe. The rishis of the past and the rishis of the now and those yet to come also are seers. Their seeing is not with the two eyes; it is with the third eye, the eye of the soul. Gurudeva observed, "The intellect in its capacity to contain truth is a very limited tool, while faith is a very broad, accommodating and embracing faculty. The mystery of life and beyond life, of Siva, is really better understood through faith than through intellectual reasoning."

The focus of many religions is on helping those with no faith in God to believe in God. For Western faiths, belief in God is the beginning and the end of the process. Once you have come to believe in God, there is nothing more to do. Your salvation is assured. However, in Hinduism belief is only the first step. Hindus want to move beyond just believing in God to experiencing the Divine for themselves.

Faith, called *astikya* in Sanskrit, is the fourth of ten spiritual practices called *niyamas*, literally meaning "to unleash." The *niyamas* are ethical and religious practices that release or cultivate one's refined, soul qualities. These observances comprise the second limb of the *ashtanga* ("eight-limbed") yoga system, which is codified in numerous scriptures.

Gurudeva summarizes faith as a Hindu practice: "Astikya is to cultivate an unshakable faith. Believe firmly in God, Gods, guru and your path to enlightenment. Trust in the words of the masters, the scriptures and traditions. Practice devotion and *sadhana* to inspire experiences that build advanced faith. Be loyal to your lineage, one with your *satguru*. Shun those who try to break your faith by argument and accusation. Avoid doubt and despair."

Like faith, the world's creation is addressed in all religions. A common Hindu view is that God creates and *is* His creation. This panen-



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PUBLISHER SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI READ HIS ARTICLE

theistic vision contrasts with other religious views, such as "creation out of nothing" and "non-creation," the view that reality is beginningless and eternal. The Hindu view of God's creating the world from Himself is described in the *Mundaka Upanishad*: "As a spider spins and withdraws its web, as herbs grow on the earth, as hair grows on the head and body of a person, so also from the Imperishable arises this universe."

Examining these concepts of faith and creation together enables us to make an interesting comparison between the perspectives of a modern scientist and a Hindu sage. The scientist's natural question is, "How can you prove the existence of God?" The sage's natural rejoinder is, "How can you deny the existence of God?" This polarity arises from the fact that everything the scientist perceives is matter, and everything the sage sees is God.

The cultivation of faith can be compared to the growth of a tree. As a young sapling, it can easily be uprooted, just as faith based solely on belief can easily be shaken or destroyed. Faith bolstered with philosophical knowledge is like a medium-size tree, strong and not easily disturbed. Faith matured by personal experience of God and the Gods is like a full-grown tree which can withstand external forces. Let's look more closely at faith's three developmental stages.

Blind Faith: Faith in its initial stage is simple belief without the support of either knowledge or experience. Keeping our faith strong in this phase depends heavily on the company we keep. We need to associate with spiritual companions and avoid worldly and nonreligious people. Attending a weekly *satsang* with like-minded devotees is sustaining. Having the darshan of visiting swamis and other Hindu religious leaders helps keep our faith strong, as we see them as living examples, souls who know from experience the principles we believe in.

Informed Conviction: Faith in its second stage is belief strengthened by a sound understanding of Hindu philosophy. Gurudeva called this the bedrock on which faith is sustained. It is established by studying in a systematic and consistent manner to increase your knowledge about Hindu philosophy and practices. Such a study can include comparing Hinduism with the world's other major religions to understand how they differ and how they



are similar.

Personal Realization: In the third stage of faith, personal experience transforms informed conviction into certainty. Gurudeva refers to this inner knowing as advanced faith, established by one's own spiritual, unsought-for, unbidden revelations, visions or flashes of intuition, which one remembers even stronger as the months go by, more vividly than something read from a book, seen on television or heard from a friend or a philosopher. Gurudeva stresses that spiritual experiences—when verified by what yogis, rishis and sadhus have seen and heard and whose explanations centuries have preserved—create a new, superconscious intellect. This type of faith,

In God's Hand: Having attained the third stage of faith, this woman, artistically held in God's protective palm, expresses the bliss of knowing that Divinity upholds and abides within all existence, including herself, and that everything is in perfect order at every point in time.

more a knowing than a conviction, is unshakable.

As we evolve spiritually, faith matures. I have seen so many devotees growing into a deeper relationship with God, a more profound acceptance of Divinity in their lives. Here are some examples.

First Example: A girl attends the local temple weekly with her parents but never thinks much about Hindu beliefs and practices. As a teenager, she enjoys reading books about holy men and women, the stories of their lives and their wise sayings. The experience of these great souls noticeably deepens her conviction in the precepts she was taught at the temple as a child.

Second Example: A young man attends an *upadesha* by a visiting swami whose presence is radiant with spiritual light. His talk increases the seeker's faith and inspires him to intensify his religious practices.

Third Example: While worshiping at an ancient shrine to Lord Ganesha during a pilgrimage to Sri Lanka, a man has a life-altering vision. The Lord of Obstacles walks out of the shrine and stands before him, giving blessings, then walks back into the shrine. This dramatic experience convinces him, through and through, that the Gods are real.

Fourth Example: A woman meditates every morning, but her thinking always distracts her and she never goes deeply within. One morning, for no apparent reason, distractions recede and she finds herself going in and in and in and staying in an expansive, peaceful state for a long time. Returning to normal awareness, she sees life differently, holding a new perspective that God is a consciousness permeating all, and she is that consciousness. The belief that the soul and God are one takes on new meaning to her.

Fifth Example: A faith-building experience that many Hindus shared occurred in 1995. It all began when one man in New Delhi had a dream that Ganesha craved a little milk. In the early morning he went to a temple where a priest allowed him to offer a spoonful of milk to the small stone image. Both watched in astonishment as the milk disappeared. Within hours news had spread across India that Ganesha was accepting milk offerings. Tens of millions of people of all ages flocked to temples across the globe and had the same experience. A Reuters report quoted Anila Premji: "I held the spoon out level, and it just disappeared. To me it was a miracle. It gave me a feeling that there is a God, a sense of Spirit on this Earth."

An important aspect of deepening our faith is building confidence in our innate divinity and our ability to experience it. We are fortunate in the modern Hindu world to have enlightened men and women in whom we can recognize high spiritual attainments. In them we have living examples of the illumined state we hope to one day achieve. We must remember that their attainment is our own potential; it is, in fact, the spiritual destiny of each soul in this or a future life. The path to such attainment involves regular practice of devotion and meditation, which leads eventually to personal experiences of the Divine.

LETTERS

Jai to Madhvacharya

I recently received your July/August/September 2008 issue, including the article "Difference Is Real! The Life and Teachings of Sri Madhva, One of India's Greatest Spiritual Masters." Ever since, I am inspired and enlightened. Thank you.

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We Need Real History

It is a sad fact that Vedic/Hindu history and culture does not get any coverage in the mainstream of society. I watch The History Channel avidly but have yet to see any programs about our history. Western Christian, Jewish and Muslim history gets the lime-light. The Mughal invasion is airbrushed as a great event. How many people know that over 10,000 temples were destroyed and their wealth looted? Many Hindus were taxed, killed or converted during this time.

Everyone is still fed the fallacious story that all North Indians are offspring of Aryan invaders. All these misconceptions and falsities need to be highlighted. This biased world view has pushed our religion into the realms of myth. We need to be proactive and educate the world that our religion is not a myth but a vibrant way of life, a great, peaceful religion with a wealth of knowledge and teachings.

Documentaries should be made and shown on channels like National Geographic, BBC Knowledge and The History Channel, or a new channel needs to be created to convey the real story of Indians/Hindus to the masses. Other religions and groups have an upper hand because they have channels dedicated to their views, opinions and propaganda. Daily we are besieged on every news channel about the plight of the Palestinians. How many people know about the Kashmiri pandits who are refugees in their own homeland, or the millions of Hindus who lost their lives and homes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir? The current plight of Hindus in Afghanistan and Pakistan is sad; they must live in fear and as second-class citizens.

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Iraivan Temple

The Jul/Aug/Sep 2009 feature story by Laina Melwani, "Siva's Sanctuary in Tropical Hawaii," is excellent. It is a must-read for anyone planning a pilgrimage, as then only will they be able to appreciate the painstaking efforts made by Gurudeva, Bodhinatha, the swamis, yogis and sadhakas, the silpis and the many devotees to build this once-in-a-lifetime, wondrous temple. Though it was overlooked,

mention must be made of Gurudeva's foresight to ensure the future retirement benefits of the silpis back in Bengaluru, which makes them a happy, working family team. Where else have we heard of silpis' making donations to the temple project they are working on in the West?

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Thanks for "What Is Hinduism?"

Thank you for making the book *What is Hinduism?* available for free on your website. I have downloaded it and enjoyed every page. I was influenced by the typical Western false ideas and prejudices about Hinduism, but now I have learned a lot about this fantastic religion. I must say I feel like a Hindu myself.

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Questionable Dairy Ethics

As a vegetarian, I am no longer sure that dairy is ethical to eat. Dairy herds experience a lot of pain. Calves are wantonly farmed to make their mothers produce milk, then killed as a byproduct. Cows no longer producing sufficient milk get slaughtered, often without anesthesia. Even organic producers use factory farming methods and grossly misrepresent their "happy cow" production facilities. I am beginning to wonder if there really is a difference between eating cows and milking them, then killing them. If someone is willing to hand over their reproductive rights, have their children taken away from them, and give you the food they were making for their young, shouldn't we in turn give them a protected, peaceful, caring home through the end of their natural lives? If we aren't willing to fairly compensate the cow for its services nowadays, how can ingesting dairy be justified more than any other animal product?

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Well Water Removes Sin?

I read with interest your article, "Washed in the Waters of Rameswaram" (Apr/May/ Jun 2009). I understand that this South Indian temple has 22 wells that relieve pilgrims' karmas and bestow blessings. I am a Hindu, who was born in India, but ever since I was a teenager, I always had trouble believing in the notion that one can wash one's sins off just by taking a dip in the waters of the Ganges River. Therefore, I have trouble accepting that just by getting drenched by the waters of Rameswaram's wells one can wash

off one's sins. Can somebody explain to me how that is consistent with the teachings of the *Upanishads* and *Gita*? How do we know that this effect of the sacred bath is nothing but a placebo effect, caused by the phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecy? I feel rejuvenated every morning after taking a shower, so what's so surprising if people feel rejuvenated by taking a bath at Rameswaram? If it were that easy to wash one's sins off, then the law of karma would be meaningless! A man can commit all the sins he wants to commit and then wash them all off by taking a bath in the sacred waters. I would urge HINDUISM TODAY to focus more on the basics of Hinduism, instead of glorifying the fringe and controversial elements of Hinduism.

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Hindu Genocide in Sri Lanka

It is refreshing to learn through the article "Meet the Young Hindu American Foundation" (Apr/May/Jun 2009) that HAF has taken on the issue of the human rights of minority Hindus in different countries, such as Malaysia, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. I would like to urge HAF to also take on the ongoing genocide of Hindus in Sri Lanka, not only during the over 25 years of civil war between the majority Sinhala Buddhists and the minority Tamil Hindus, but since the war officially ended in May this year.

At a UNCHR hearing in Geneva in March 1998, Joaquin Mbomio of North South XXI stated that 1,800 Hindu temples had been destroyed by the Sinhala army. In the three months ending the middle of April, the UN estimated that 6500 civilians had been killed, while it has no official figure after that date. A report by The Times (UK), claiming a source in the UN, says that the number now appears to be at least 20,000. But no one knows the real numbers, since the government has banned the UN, relief agencies such as the International Red Cross and reporters from entering the areas of conflict.

Due to the government blockade of food and medicine for months, the 290,000 civilians that have survived the aerial bombing look like holocaust survivors. They are currently kept in camps surrounded by barbed wire, reminiscent of the Nazi concentration camps. Even after the declaration of victory and the end of war, the government has sustained its refusal to give international aid organizations unhindered access to the refugee camps, something the UN is demanding. During a limited, government-controlled visit, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stated that the camps were the "most ap-

palling" scenes he has ever seen in the world. More than in any other country, the Hindus in Sri Lanka are paying a high price for being Hindu, and it would be a worthy cause for HAF to be a voice for these voiceless Hindus.

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Resurgence in Temples

Kerala is justly proud of its rich cultural heritage. In ancient times, Hindu temples were the epicenters of all cultural and artistic activities. Traditional artists were patronized by temples and those associated with them. However, we see that today this socio-cultural activity of the temple is often restricted to conducting temple festivals. Few temples can boast of participating in welfare activities in the vicinity. Apart from being a place of worship for believers, it does not partake in their joys or sorrows. The temple has no provision to help the needy or intervene in family disputes, avert suicides, help conduct weddings for the poor, etc. Very few temples run charitable institutions that are aimed at the welfare of the needy. One should rethink the role of the temple in the face of the revenue it generates and adds to the state exchequer.

In stark contrast to the complacency of our Hindu institutions stands the active participation of the Muslim and Christian clergy in the welfare of their believers. True Hinduism as a creed is all-encompassing, benevolent and encourages questioning of its basic tenets. Certainly, in this modern world one can-

not be bound by dogmas of earlier times, but the lackadaisical approach of today's Hindu leaders has alienated many a believer and made him vulnerable to the lures of faiths that promise timely intervention and help. The Muslim believer benefits from the moral and financial support from the moulavi, and the poor Christian benefits by help from the parish. Where does the Hindu go? Who will help him? The tragedy is that Hindus are a minority in the world, and we are neither protected nor assisted in our own country.

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News About India

My mother lives in Germany, and she delights in telling me when India makes it to the local paper. The heat wave with temperatures above 44 degrees, and people dying because of it, is reported every year. The news that a child died in school after having been punished by her teacher also found a space. In recent times, she mentioned economic news, like the takeover of a Bavarian company by an Indian. The usual stereotype of India as poor and corrupt, of course, is always strengthened. When "Slumdog Millionaire" got all those Oscars, my mother told me happily that the film was about India.

She sounded quite excited about a discussion on TV related to the Pope's visit to Israel. An elderly Jewish theologian on the panel said that the Orient and especially India were far ahead of the Occident in the past,

that India laid the basis for our mathematics, that it had great scientific knowledge and that its art, music and dance are outstanding. Then my mother related something the panelist said that made me sit up: Ancient Indians knew that we are all children of the same God and that there is only one God. Of course, this is not really news in India. Everyone here knows that the Deity they worship is one aspect or one name of the whole, and they don't mind if their friends use another form and another name to adore the Divine. The acknowledgement from a Jewish theologian on German national TV that in ancient times the people of India worshiped the one God of all humanity signifies, however, a change, and was therefore news to me.

Oh, what all this realization would entail if it were to spread: no more fights over religion, no claims of exclusivity of truth, no attempts to convert anyone. Everyone would be free to use his brain and find out for himself who he really is deep inside—and maybe find God instead.

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a power that enlivens all of dharma and countless souls everywhere, far beyond its circle of readers. Without it, there would be a hole there."

Both father Raghunath, who lives in New Mexico, and Alok, who lives in San Francisco, generously support the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. "I want to dedicate my life to helping Hinduism," confides Raghunath. "Hinduism is the salvation of a human being. It is so vital. And HINDUISM TODAY is doing so much that supporting it is the least we can do."

Please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, too, so your magazine can grow from strength to strength and send ever more salutary shakti around the world. Learn more about the Production Fund at www.hheonline.org/productionfund/ and ask to receive our Production Fund e-newsletter at www.gurudeva.org/email-news

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Keeping Hinduism's Inner Power Flowing

Genuine striving and generosity can change the world

ALOK LATHI'S WORDS OF PRAISE were surprising at first. "Simply having HINDUISM TODAY on your shelf is a blessing," he said, "even if you don't read it!" He elaborated: even more valuable than its content, he felt, is the shakti, or power, the magazine carries, and he illustrated with a story that begins at the time of India's independence.

His mother, Bharati, grew up in Vinoba Bhave's ashram, renowned for strict spiritual disciplines—and, little girl or not, a great deal was expected of her. When she moved to the USA in 1965, she brought her training and practice with her and, for the rest of her days, lived immersed in hours of daily sadhana. "She was the family's spiritual dynamo," explains Alok, "deeply influencing us—and countless others, too. After Mother made



"Hinduism is the salvation of a human being."
Alok and Celeste Lathi on their wedding day, in 2002, with parents, Raghunath and Bharati Lathi.

QUOTES & QUIPS

Find the One everywhere and in everything and there will be an end to all pain and suffering.

Sri Anandamayi Ma (1896-1982), Bengali mystic and saint

When visiting Chicago, Swami Vivekananda stayed in the house of a businessman who was an associate of John D. Rockefeller. Many times had Mr. Rockefeller heard his friends talking about an extraordinary and wonderful Hindu monk, and many times he had been invited to meet Swamiji but always refused. At that time Rockefeller was not yet at the peak of his fortune, but was already powerful and strong-willed, a hard man to advise. One day, on a whim, the millionaire briskly walked through the door and said he wanted to see the Hindu monk. Swami Vivekananda, who was behind his writing table, did not even lift his eyes when the magnate entered the study room. In their ensuing conversation, Swami told Rockefeller secrets about his past that Rockefeller

alone knew. Then, Swami boldly explained that God had given him all his wealth in order that he might have an opportunity to help people and do good. Annoyed that someone dared to tell him what to do, Rockefeller stormed out. Coming back a week later, he brought plans to donate an enormous sum of money to charity. This was Rockefeller's first large donation to the public welfare. "Well, there you are," he said to Vivekananda, "You can thank me for it." Swamiji then said softly, "No sir, it is for you to thank me." *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 9*

Life is meant for God-realization. If you die without attaining God-realization, your life is in vain. Even having one hundred gurus will not help, unless the disciple

has a great desire for liberation and tries to get rid of all that stands in the way.

Swami Chidananda (1916-2008), President of the Divine Life Society

Most people, most of the time, are under the influence of the ego. Now, when someone is driving under the influence of alcohol, a policeman can pull that drunk driver over and measure the level of inebriation. But what policeman has the authority to pull you over and give you an egolizer test? You are driving, living, acting and speaking under the influence of the ego.

Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, successor to Swami Muktananda

Can you weep for Him with intense longing of heart? Men shed a jugful of tears for the sake of their children, for their wives, or for money. But who weeps for God? **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836-1886)

Remain calm, serene, always in command of yourself. You will then find out how easy it is to get along. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893-1952), Founder of Self-Realization Fellowship

We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is already disappearing. **R.D. Laing** (1927-1989), Scottish psychiatrist

Killing time murders opportunities.

Time is more precious than money; it is the most valuable thing in the world. Time is life. Use it profitably in spiritual pursuits. **Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh** (1887-1963), founder of the Divine Life Society

As righteousness resides in the hearts of the virtuous, so does deceit dwell in the hearts of thieves. **Tirukural** 288

DID YOU KNOW?

Trees for Temple Building

By S.P. SABHARATHNAM

THE SACRED AGAMAS, HINDUISM's scripture on temple worship, are very comprehensive. They include all there is to know on the subject, from the loftiest metaphysics of the high planes of existence, where the Gods reside, to instructions about how to get the right lumber to build a new temple.

The *Kamika Agama* says, "You must select only trees growing outside the village or the city. From the place where the temple will be built, the tree should be east, north, west or any direction in between these three, but other directions are to be avoided. The tree should not be poisonous."

Ahimsa, the dharmic law of not harming any living being, is followed carefully. "Even to build the most beautiful chariot for God,



HINDUISM TODAY

The biggest sorrow is poverty. The greatest happiness is that of meeting with a saint, which is beyond compare. **Tulsidas** in the *Ramacharitamanasa*, 16th century

There are vegetarians and vegans, but there are also vagueans—those who are not sure about what they eat. **Anonymous**

People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. It is sanity—and to be sane is more dramatic than to be mad. **G.K. Chesterton** (1874-1936), English writer

If you want to be happy, be. **Leo Tolstoy** (1828-1910), Russian writer

You can gain an intricate control of the various things that change in and about you. Lean your thoughts and feelings in the right direction, and discover how quickly your circumstances will change their direction. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

Deep Cover



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BASICS OF HINDUISM

Monism and Dualism

HINDUS BELIEVE IN ONE SUPREME Being, an all-pervasive Divinity that sustains all there is. But how to reconcile an imperfect world with the atemporal perfection of God?

Philosophers and saints have long debated the exact relationship of God, the soul and world, in exchanges that shaped our religion and set the path for millions of followers. Out of their speculations have blossomed hundreds of schools of thought.

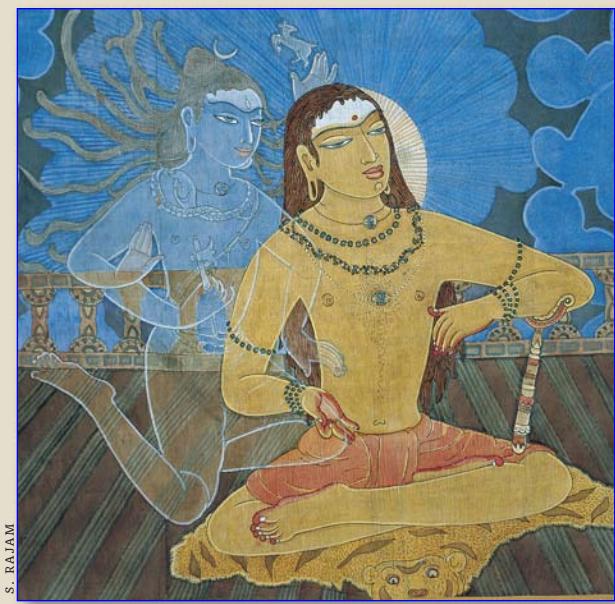
At one end of Hinduism's rich spectrum is monism, or *advaita*, which perceives a unity of God, soul and world. Generally, monists believe God is immanent. If creation were a pot, God Himself would be the clay from which creation is made of. There is nothing that is not Him—any differences are but illusions that need to be removed, veils over the discernment of the soul. This is the view proposed by Adi Shankara and others.

At the other end, there are the schools that teach dualism, *dvaita*—exemplified

by Madhva and the early Pashupatas—which speak about a real and eternal differentiation. Dualists believe in God as Lord and Creator, but He remains ever separate from man, regardless of the evolution of an individual soul. In the same analogy, dualists see God as the potter, intimately involved but eternally different from the clay pot He makes.

In between, there are views describing reality as one and yet not one, *dvaita-advaita*, advocated by sages such as Ramanuja, Srikantha and Nimarka. Though the specifics of *dvaita-advaita* differ from tradition to tradition, its main creed describes a perfect, beginningless oneness of God and creation. In this

view, the world and God are one in many, but not all, aspects. In time, the difference resolves itself in perfect identity—and that is the path of all souls.



S. RAJAM

Sri Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharya

2009 HINDU OF THE YEAR

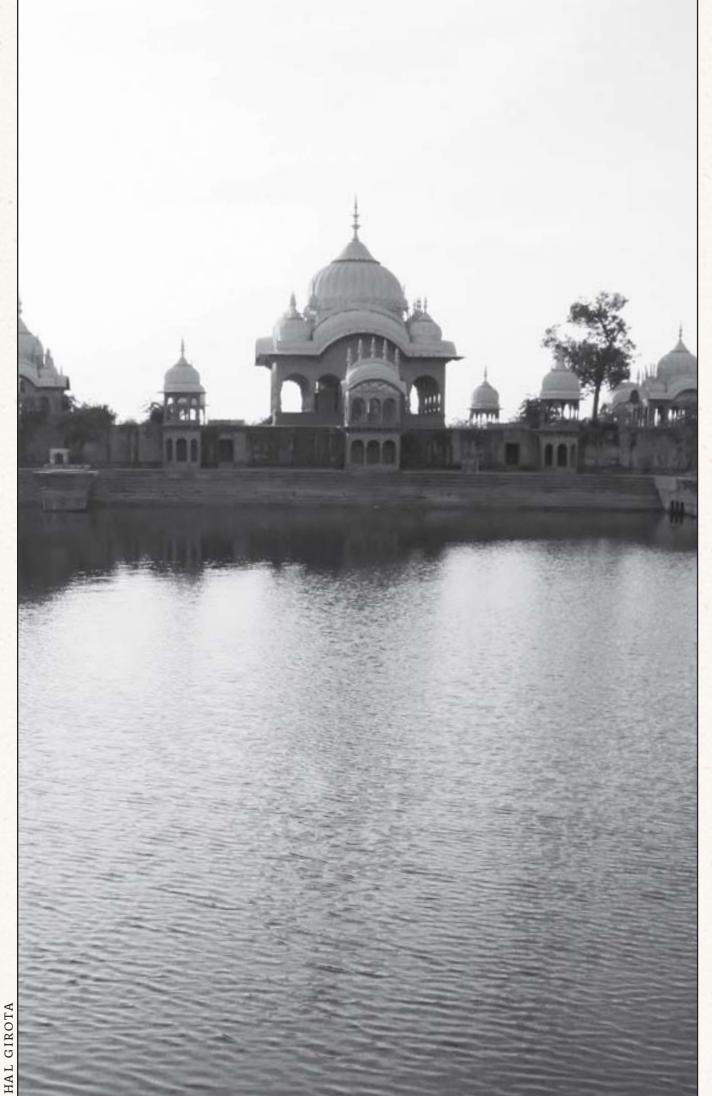
BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

SRI SWAMI GOPAL SHARAN Devacharya, of Vrindavan and New Delhi, was chosen by HINDUISM TODAY as the recipient of the Hindu Renaissance Award, becoming our Hindu of the Year for 2009. Swamiji is of the Nimbaraka Sampradaya, one of the four traditional Vaishnava teaching lineages. He travels extensively and is the force behind the construction of 72 new temples worldwide.

When I first met Swamiji at his Vrindavan ashram, he recounted his unusual life story. When Swami was just five years old, a renowned sadhu approached his parents. Theirs was a special child, he said, with potential for greatness. However, the boy would have close encounters with death, and would only survive if he lived a pure, spiritual life, under the care of a saint.

Alarmed, but filled with faith, the parents traveled to the sacred city of Vrindavan. They took the child to Sri Swami Lalita Sharan Devacharyaji of the Nimbaraka Sampradaya. When the young boy reached the ashram, he was overwhelmed with joy, playful and relaxed, as if he had found his long-lost home. Swami Lalita Sharan Maharaj took the boy to the banks of the sacred Yamuna River and declared, "Today, this boy has received a new life." Later Swami Lalita Sharan recounted, "His parents left him with me, and I do not even remember their names."

Shortly after the boy moved into the ashram, the prophecy of



Speaking of God: (right) In the company of fellow swamis, Swami Gopal Sharan gives an inspired speech during the opening of his new charitable homeopathic and western medicine clinic, where over 500 people receive care daily; (above) the placid waters of Kusum Sarovar in Vrindavan, from which it is said Lord Krishna plucked lotuses He offered to Radha

death was fulfilled. It was during an eclipse, a time astrologers caution against as eerie and inauspicious. Bathing in the Yamuna and singing bhajans, but unable to swim, the youth was caught in a strong current. Had a sadhu not pulled him out, he would have drowned. Being in the company of holy men had saved his life, literally.

At the age of seven, the future guru took his first vows in preparation to one day become a sannyasin. "I learned everything at the ashram; even my secular schooling happened there," recalls Swamiji.

He enrolled in Banaras Hindu University as a teenager, to study Sanskrit and Vedanta. Then, just 17 and still pursuing his studies, he was initiated as a sannyasin by Swami Lalita Devacharya. His guru instructed him with eloquent simplicity: "A saint, a tree, a river, a mountain and the earth, these exist but for the welfare of others."

Following his initiation, Swami Gopal Sharan began his ministry quietly, finishing his Sanskrit studies and preparing for the days ahead. A final purification, perhaps the last of the events augured by his childhood seer, was a serious car accident at the age of 18. Swami was the only survivor. Hospitalized for forty days, he pondered the fact of human suffering and the divine grace that had granted him life. Finally healed and spiritually more mature, he began to travel. "In the year 1980 I started traveling abroad to promote Hinduism. My first

COURTESY GOLOK DHAM ASHRAM

trip was to the UK," Swami recalls.

It was the start of a far-reaching and influential global mission. "He has a constant travel schedule all around the world," says Brahmachari Vrajvihari Sharan, a close disciple studying in the UK. He regarded his travels as a means of promoting Hinduism and speaking to Hindus no matter where they are. In 1980, most Hindus in the UK were immigrants who spoke Indian languages.

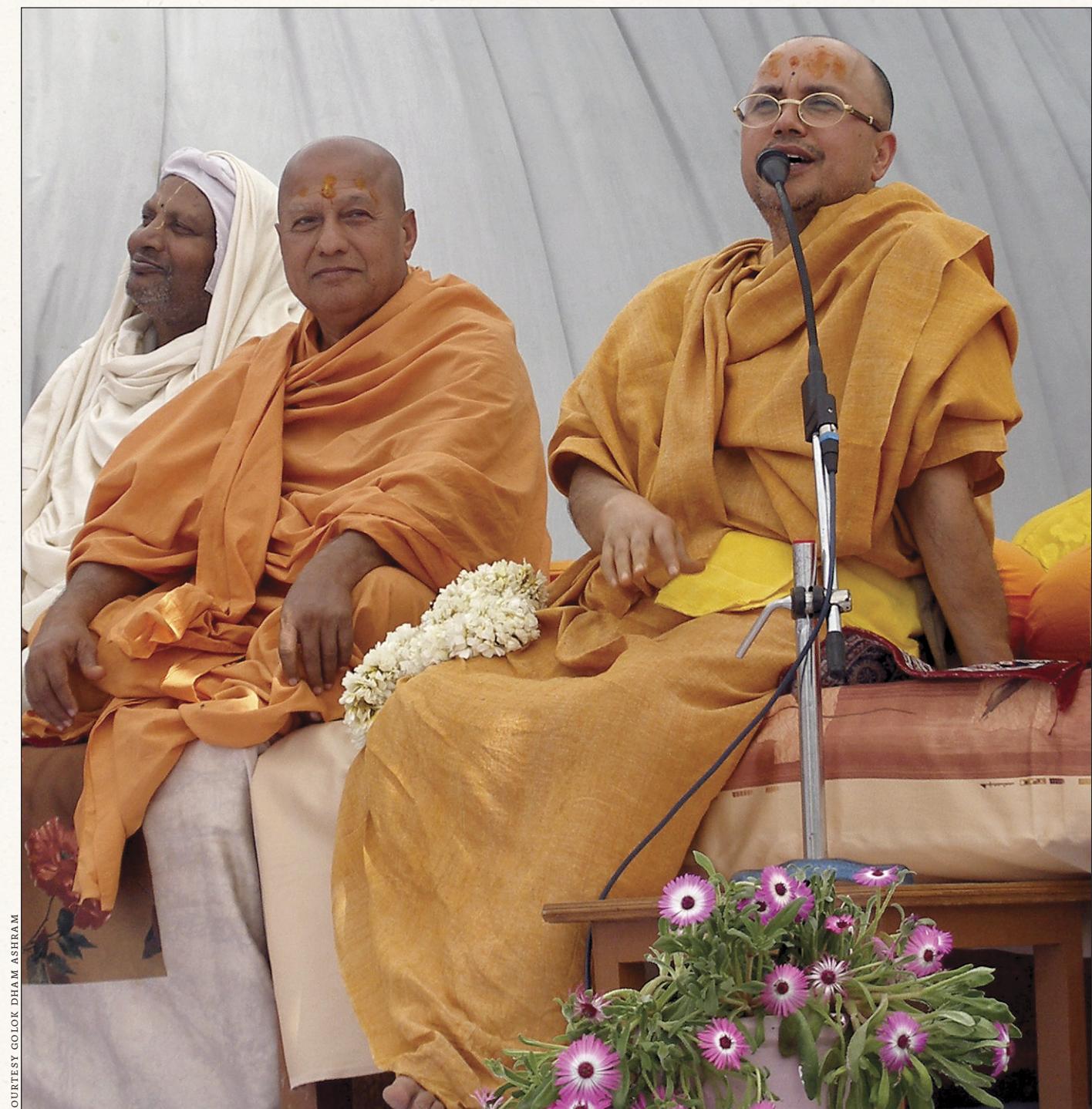
A Spiritual Powerhouse

While his guru stayed in the Vrindavan ashram, Swamiji reached out to devotees in Canada, America, the UK, Germany and elsewhere, inspiring, consoling and guiding each one. In so doing, he cultivated and nurtured an international following that is wide and influential, and this only by his early thirties.

In spite of his youth, Swami Gopal Sharan was considered an obvious choice to become the successor to his guru, Sri Swami

Lalita Devacharya Maharaj, who also made it clear to his close devotees that he regarded Swami as the one most qualified to carry on his work. The guru described him as "always quick to learn and profoundly compassionate." Swami Lalita Devacharya, immersed in God and blissful devotion, free from the stress that ails ordinary humans, left his body in 2007 at the age of 104.

Swami Gopal Sharan told HINDUISM TODAY, "My guruji was a man of a very simple





At the feet of the saint: A rare photo reveals deep affection between Swami Gopal Sharan and his guru

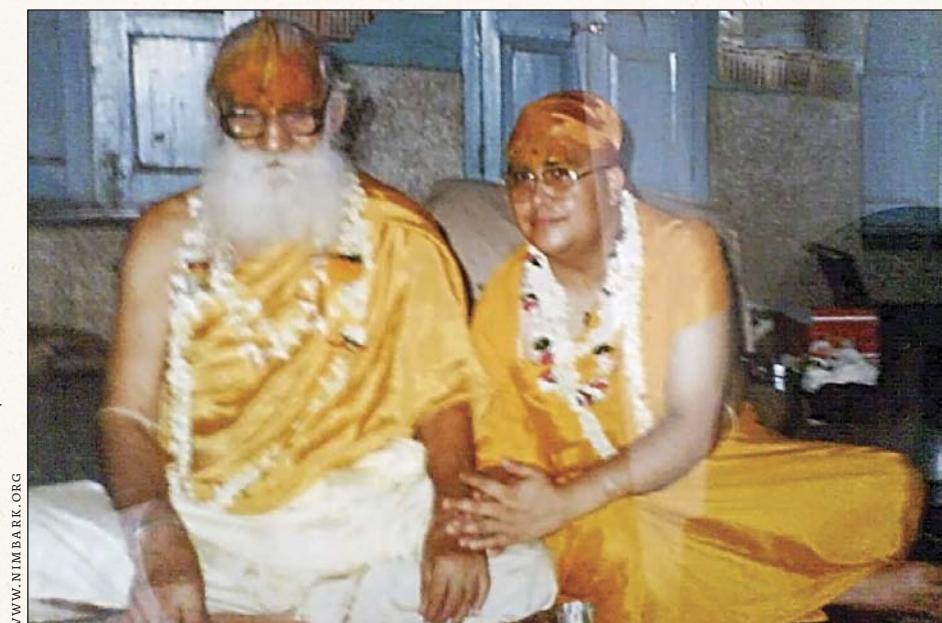
nature. For as long as I can remember, I found myself at his feet. He had the highest moral character, promoting our traditions and helping the poor and the needy. He loved to inspire others to inquire, to learn, to know more. His life was full of discipline and love. Those are qualities I have tried to imbibe from him."

Building God's Palaces

Building and maintaining places of worship and ashrams is an esteemed activity in the Nimbarka Sampradaya. Swami explains, "We have ancient temples of our *sampadaya* all over India. I am not involved with all of them, but in many prominent places I either belong to the managing committees or they frequently seek my advice. I think we have ashrams in every nook and corner of India! In Vrindavan, the gurus of the Nimbarka Sampradaya have more than 60 ashrams, big and small. I estimate that in all of India we have hundreds of ashrams, mostly in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Bengal and Maharashtra."

It was in holy Vrindavan, the city where Lord Krishna spent his childhood, that Swami Gopal Sharan built his first ashram, not

The path of devotion: A stunning Radha-Krishna shrine as found in many of the temples built by Swami around the world



far from that of his guruji. Today,

Swami lives most of the time at Brijwasan Golok Dham, a five-acre sanctuary of beauty and tranquility that he established in 2004.

Coming from nearby Delhi, a chaotic and polluted urban center, pilgrims find themselves stepping into an unexpected oasis of lush greenery, a place where one can sit under an inviting tree and meditate. Water fountains and a pond add to the serene atmosphere. But, as Swami explains, most important is that the entire complex, built over a

14-year period with the support of devotees worldwide, is designed to honor and foster Hinduism's traditions. The ashram's temple is built according to the *Vastu Shastras*. On the walls, art and writings convey the wisdom of the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and other sacred literature. There are Hindu symbols wherever one looks, be they tilak motifs, sacred plants or inspiring architecture.

The Brijwasan ashram is a fitting command center for a global operation. Its heart is the temple of Radha-Krishna, the Su-

The Award

PREVIOUS RECIPIENTS OF THE HINDU Renaissance Award are Swami Paramananda Bharati (1990), Swami Chidananda Saraswati (1991), Swami Chinmayananda, "Muniji" (1992), Mata Amritanandamayi Ma (1993), Swami Satchidananda (1994), Pramukhswami Maharaj (1995), Sathya Sai Baba (1996), Sri Chinmoy (1997), Swami Bua (1998), Swami Chidananda Saraswati of the Divine Life Society (1999), Ma Yoga Shakti (2000), T. S. Sambamurthy Sivachariar (2001), Dada Vaswani (2002), Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal (2003), Dr. K. Pichai Sivacharya (2004), Swami Tejomayananda (2005), Ramesh Bhai Oza (2006), Sri Balagangadharanathaswami (2007) and Swami Avdheshananda (2008).

Honoring a global mission: the Hindu Renaissance Award 2009 plaque

HINDU RENAISSANCE AWARD 2009 Hindu of the Year

Presented by Hinduism Today magazine to Sri Dharma Ratna Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharyaji of the holy Nimbarka Sampradaya, for his commitment to the pristine tradition of this ancient Vaishnava lineage and his tireless travels worldwide to build temples, promote Hindu solidarity, teach tolerance and strengthen the Sanatana Dharma.



Where the World's One Billion Hindus Live

Hindus are one-sixth of the human family. While India is home to 93% of the world's one billion Hindus, nearly 70 million are scattered widely across the globe.



apartments collectively called the Sant Nivas.

There are currently 22 resident brahmacharis. In addition to their sadhanas and religious training, they see to the ashram's many needs. Swami explains, "Brahmacharis have two options ahead of them. If they want to

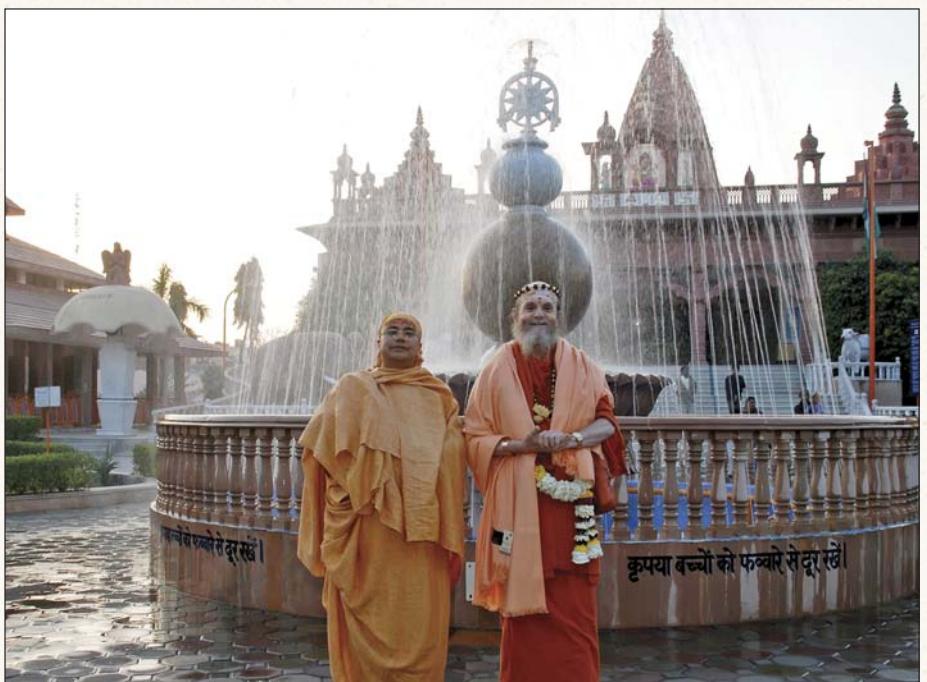
British monarch meets Hindu sage: Swami honors Queen Elizabeth II with a shawl during her 2007 visit to one of the 30 temples he founded in the UK



COURTESY GOLOK DHAM ASHRAM

Nearby is the *yagnasala*, a vast pavilion built to the dimensions laid out in the *Yajurveda*, with a massive *havana kunda* (fire pit) that is more than six feet deep. Here, grains and ghee made with the milk from the ashram's cows are offered during elaborate Vedic ceremonies.

All Hindus have love and gratitude for the cow, but none can match that of Krishna's devotees. Brijwasan Golok Dham's 20 fine cows are cared for at the Sri Hari Gaushala, where Swamiji honors the gentle bovines every day. Feeding them is among his first sadhanas every morning. He offers sweet tokens of gratitude for their



PHAL GIROTA

Dharmic citadel: Sri Swami Gopal Sharan and Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami at the entrance of Brijwasan

cred *prana pratista* ceremony, the opening of the Deities' eyes, invoking Divinity into them and marking the commencement of worship. Swami promises, "If any devotee, from anywhere, approaches us to build a Vaishnava temple, I will help."

Swami believes in reaching out to Hindus outside of his *sampradaya*, supporting and creating bonds with Saivites, Smartas and other Vaishnavas. In any of these branches of Hinduism, he states, one can "drink the real nectar of our Sanatana Dharma."

Swami's positive influence on the community enhances Hinduism's standing in society at large. During the inauguration of the three-story Sri Lakshmi Narayan Mandir at Bradford in May 2007, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness Prince Philip attended the ceremony. It was the first and only time the monarch has attended the dedication of a Hindu temple. Swami Gopal Sharan graced Her Majesty with a shawl. Swami said the Anglican Church had opposed her visit, but she decided to attend because she understands how important temples are to the Hindu community. "Everybody bows before love," Swami pointed out.

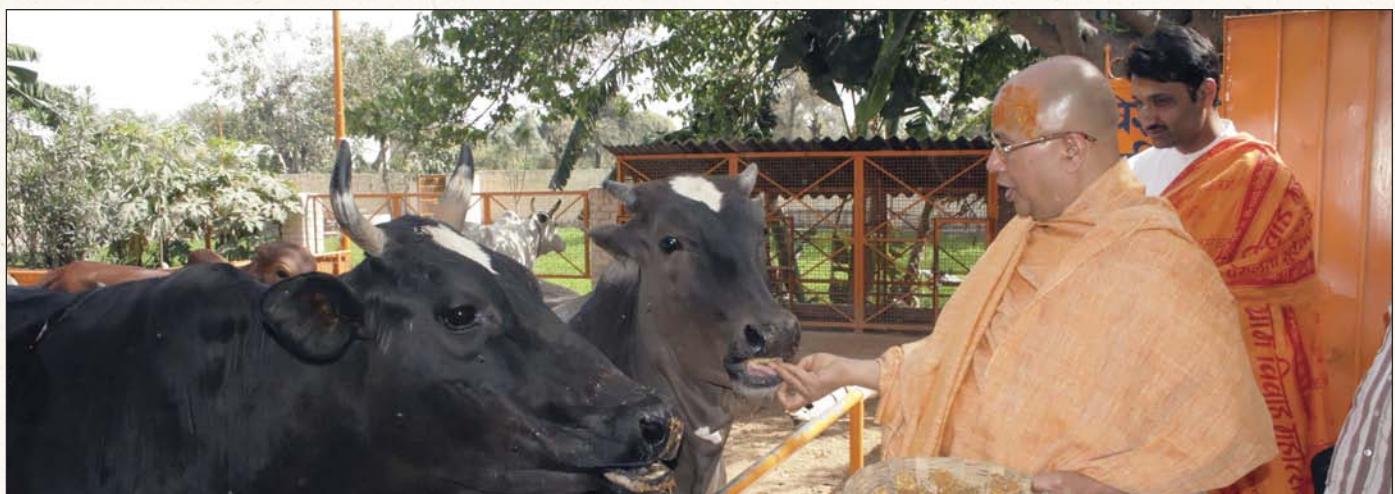
Ever Approachable
Swami's ability to reach out to devotees in faraway lands—as a counselor, a guide or the guru himself—is invaluable to Hindus of the diaspora who feel the need to maintain their connection with India, holding to their religion and their roots. Devotes and admirers speak highly of him and say their relationship with him is profoundly close.

"Guruji is a very loving person," says Dr. Kamal Gandhi, a Los Angeles doctor originally from Mumbai. "He is not a distant figure, far removed from us. When you and he are in

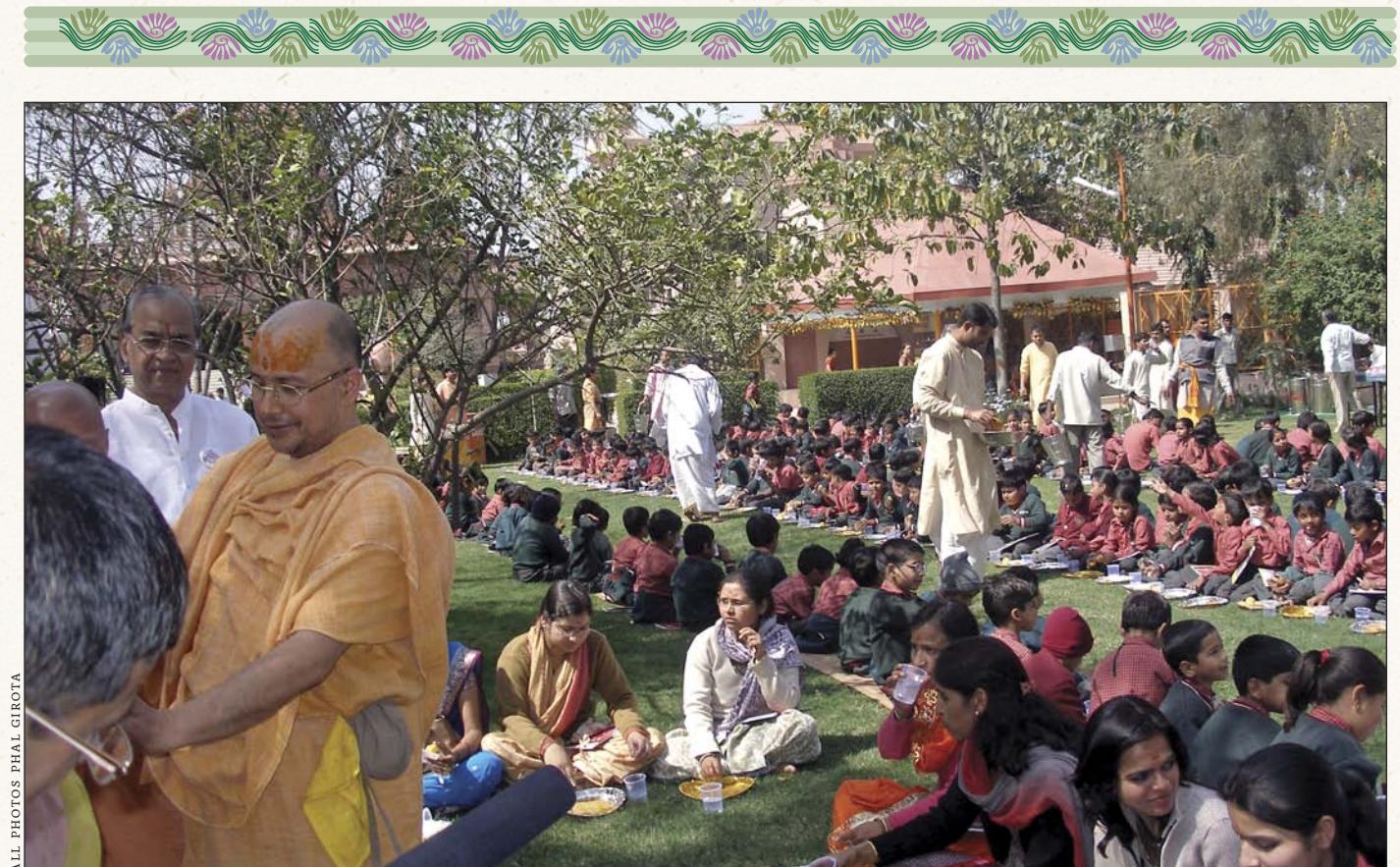
become householders, they can do so. However, they might choose to live a monk's life, and maybe even take *sanyas*."

Brijwasan Golok Dham ashram has a media department, Karyalaya, where publications, video and audio are produced and www.golokdham.org and www.nimbark.org managed. Swami is avidly using the latest technology to make his message of devotion to Sri Radha-Krishna reach every TV, computer and bookshelf in the world, saying, "Computers and the Internet, if positively used, are good for promotion of dharma." Finally, Swamiji's personal residence is called the Kutir ("small hut"), which includes his office and an audience hall.

Gratitude: The Sri Hari Gaushala, where Swami honors nature's most generous creature



PHAL GIROTA



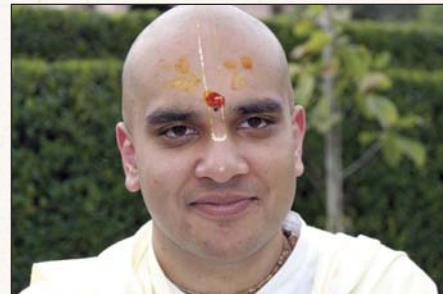
ALL PHOTOS PHAL GIROTA

Spirituality and joy : (above) Schoolchildren are given food and love during a visit to Brijwasan; (clockwise from top right) blissful devotees Megh Gupta, Neera Bandari, Seema Duggal and Brahmachari Vrajvihari Sharan

the same place, you can always go see him, without making any appointment. We devotees are part of his family. He is our loving father and mother, all in one." Dr. Kamal's wife, Shradha Gandhi, shares, "We are inspired by his devotion to Hinduism. Every time we meet him, he has more knowledge to share. He inspires us to become better human beings. He also reminds us to remain connected to our own roots, follow our own religion, which we sometimes tend to forget while living in the West. He makes us understand how important it is to perform the daily rituals and practices and teach them to our children."

Megh Gupta, 27, an investment banker from Toronto, Canada, has known Swami Gopal Sharan for nine years. "What is important is that I get his one-on-one attention. Guruji has followers and devotees from all corners of the world. Still, he has time to make a phone call to you, talking about subjects that concern you. He calls me from India or even UK if he has not heard from me in a while," Gupta says with gratitude. "From my Guruji I have learned what is important in life, and what is not."

Inspired by their guru, Swami's Canadian



devotees created the Golok Parikar. Exemplifying how Swami collaborates with other Hindu groups, the Golok Parikar focuses on tightening the weave of his devotees in Canada and cooperating with the Hindu community as a whole. Ranjana Sharma, a Toronto school principal, explains, "We are focusing now on community service. The Golok Parikar started a project to help the elderly, especially Hindus who have no support. We go to the hospitals and look after them, especially people who are terminally ill. We attended classes to be able to do that in a professional way." Instead of building temples in Canada specific to his own *sampradaya*, Swami wants to help the nation's 200 existing temples provide a solid base for the practice of Hinduism.

Words of Wisdom

Many of Swamiji's followers are young, in their twenties, many but not all from fami-



COURTESY, GOLOK DHAM ASHRAM

Harmony in the family: *Swami Gopal Sharany Devacharya and Swami Radhasarveshvara Sharany Devacharya Sri Sriji Maharaj, who is the highest authority of the Nimbarka Sampradaya, gaze in devotion at the newly consecrated Deities of Golok Dham Ashram in February, 2004*

society will know we are Hindus. He asks the women to always use the bindi. If we do not maintain our identity as Hindus, then how can we inspire our future generations?"

Swami speaks strongly against corporal punishment of children. "We need to give children lots of love. We must explain the reasons behind things. We should emphasize they need to study to have a positive future. In our ashram, if a child makes some mistake, we point it out to inspire her to become a better human being. We do not have the right to beat any child. Beating is bad and should not happen."

Teenagers and young adults, Swami emphasizes, should live a disciplined life because it is in their own best interest to do so. "One thing youth must avoid is the urge to be free of all restraints and disciplines. Total freedom is a false concept. Youth must have a high moral character, serve their parents in a devoted manner and uphold Hindu dharma. No matter where you live, you must live as a disciplined and cultured person.

lies of devotees. They learn that along with a tranquil, loving nature, Swami possesses a sharp straightforwardness, and a knack for clarifying lofty concepts and helping disciples understand and apply the principles of dharma. For example, he boldly says, "Anyone who eats the flesh of animals is not a Hindu." Emphasizing purity of body and mind, he explains, "We do not consume items like garlic and onion, which are hot by

nature and make our mind become restless. If our food is pure, then our thoughts will be pure. If we have bad food, we will get low thoughts. We must consume fresh vegetables, fresh fruits and fresh milk."

With religion comes the culture, Swami believes, and both shape the identity of the community. Mrs. Bahri, a devotee from Toronto, shares, "Swamiji encourages the Hindu way of dressing, so that others in our



PHAL GIRETA

The Holy Shaligram

IT IS THE OLDEST DEITY ON THE planet, according to the Nimbarka Sampradaya: a *shaligram*, worshipped as the manifested form of the Absolute, Sri Radha-Krishna.

A *shaligram* is a naturally formed stone, *svayambhu*, meaning "self-generated." Special marks denote it as a materialization of God among Vaishnavites. It is an event of supreme auspiciousness to find one and worship it. The *Skanda Purana* says, "Any person who has seen a *shaligram*, paid obeisances to Him, bathed and worshiped Him has achieved the results of performing ten million sacrifices and giving ten million cows in charity."

Though many *shaligrams* are adored with fervent devotion, perhaps none

is more revered than the one pictured at right. Called the Sri Sarveshwara Bhagawan, it was given by Lord Hamsa to the four Kumaras, who worshiped it from the primordial days of creation. It is believed this very *shaligram* was the inspiration for their enlightenment. Later Narada, the sage, carried it for thousands of years and eventually passed it on to Sri Nimbarakacharya.

Today, the Sri Sarveshwara Bhagawan is in the care of the Jagadguru of the entire Nimbarka lineage, His Holiness Sri Shri Radhasarveshvara Devacharya Maharaj, known as Sri Sriji Maharaj (see photo above). Only he and his successor are allowed to touch the sacred artifact, Lord Radha-Krishna's gift to humankind.

You cannot accept the company of just anyone, or smoke or drink, or have late nights of indulgence and foul food. Try to help others. Try to help those who are needy and suffering. If you are able to give comfort and happiness to someone, you must do it."

Another point of Swami Gopal Sharany's ministry is that the home must be the center of worship and daily sadhana. He counsels,

"In the homes where morning abhishekam of God's murti is performed, an arati is done and food is first offered to God, the environment is better. Everything depends on how sacred your daily activities are, so for example, if eating becomes an act of devotion, with prayers before eating and food taken as holy prasadam, harmony will prevail. The other option is *tamasic* food, *tamasic* living,

confused minds and the potential for deplorable domestic violence."

Brahmachari Vrajihari Sharany summarizes his guru's main message to Hindus: "If people really want peace and progress, if they want real happiness which does not end, they should go back to their old roots, where the flawless Sanatana Dharma is. There, they will find all they need."

The Origins of the Nimbarka Sampradaya

SWAMI GOPAL SHARANY DEVACHARYA belongs to the Nimbarka Sampradaya, one of the most respected Vaishnavite lineages. It has a rich history, an unbroken continuity of saints and safeguards one of the most holy *shaligrams* in existence (see sidebar, page 24).

The *Padma Purana*, an authoritative scripture among Vaishnavites, mentions the Nimbarka lineage by name. It says, "All mantras which have been given outside of an authorised *sampradaya* are fruitless." In the Kali Yuga, the scripture continues, there will be four truthful *sampradayas*, those founded by Madhva, Ramanuja, Vishnu and Nimbarka.

According to tradition, the *sampradaya* far predates the birth of Sri Nimbarka Bhagawan 5,104 years ago. First called the Kumara Sampradaya, it began when, in the celestial realms, Lord Brahma was asked a puzzling metaphysical question by His sons, the four Kumaras. Embarrassed, He could not find an answer. The Supreme Lord Radha-Krishna appeared before them as Hamsa Bhagawan and demonstrated that the question was itself fallacious, thus earning the admiration and awe of the Kumaras, who took Him as their guru. For eons they learned from Him the highest esoteric secrets of creation. Eventually, they chose a disciple, Narada Muni.

One day, walking by a neem tree, Narada was impressed by a pious man called Nyamananda, who took to the *tapas* of meditating under neem trees and fasting only on neem juice. Nyamananda was no ordinary man. It is the belief of the Kumara Sampradaya that, foreseeing the deterioration of dharma that would occur in the Kali Yuga, Lord Radha-Krishna sent his sentient holy weapon, the blazing Sudarshana Chakra—said to outshine 1,000 suns—to take birth on Earth as Nyamananda. In a human body, he forgot his divine origins, but still longed for the Lord.

Sri Narada Muni initiated him into the sacred Gopala mantra, gave him the name



God's Weapon: Lord Krishna holds the Sudarshana Chakra, Sri Nimbarka's real form

Nimbarakacharya established for the Kumara Sampradaya a path to God defined by *japa*, devotion and selfless service. In the 14th century, Sri Harivyasa Devacharya split the order into 12 branches to better spread the teachings. Each of the branches, called *dvaras*, has a guru. They work harmoniously together as a wide-reaching spiritual family. One of them, however, is the respected leader of the whole *sampradaya*, the keeper of the Sri Sarveshwara Bhagawan and the architect of the lineage's future—currently, Sri Sriji Maharaj (see photo on page 24).

A Priestly Clan Under Siege

The legendary *dikshitars* face a government takeover of Chidambaram Temple, but their profuse trials extend far in time and complexity

By RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

IT SHOULD BE AN HONOR SECOND TO NONE. In the heart of many a devout Saivite, there is a dream that arises when one sees Lord Nataraja at the most holy Chidambaram temple. It beckons to let go of all else, to devote life to Him alone. There are a few men born with this opportunity, the *dikshitar* priests whose lives revolve entirely around His service in His foremost citadel. Earning birth into such hereditary priesthood is regarded as a glorious fulfillment of many lives of bhakti and purification, and so it was centuries ago when the maharajas ruled strong, their empires centered around temples rather than palaces. In those days, a vibrant host of 3,000 priests served at Chidambaram.

These days, the *dikshitars*, reduced to little more than 300, find themselves as characters in a very different story. Though the massive stones of Lord Siva's temple still hold firmly in place, the walled chambers now witness a depopulated and impoverished priesthood, struggling to perform their work and, in some cases, even to survive. The decline of the *dikshitars* started centuries ago but has intensified in the last fifty years. The latest and most severe blow was a hostile takeover by the Tamil Nadu government on February 2, 2009, which has sparked outrage, public protests and a cloud of uncertainty, all met with nothing more than an odd silence from the Indian media.

To shed light on the controversy, HINDUISM TODAY correspondent Rajiv Malik traveled to Chidambaram in March 2009, where intense days awaited. News of his arrival—as the representative of an international publication—spread like wildfire in the town of 60,000 people whose life is deeply tied to the temple. His small hotel room became a press center, with an incessant flux of priests, devotees and leaders of local communities lining up to be interviewed. They all longed to be given a voice, offering well-informed opinions, stories, legends and mystical insights. In this emotionally charged atmosphere, Rajiv Malik was even advised against wandering alone in the evenings.

The Tamil Language Conundrum

The *dikshitar*'s latest woes were brought about by one incident, a catalyst of things long in the making. In 2008, the *oduvar* Arumugaswami—a singer of sacred Tamil songs called *devarams*—accused the *dikshitars* of not allowing him to sing to Lord Nataraja. The story brought extensive negative publicity to the priests. Stripped of most details, the news reached the Indian media portraying the *dikshitars* as arrogant Sanskritists, contemptuous of the Tamil language and callous toward the people's needs. The case was taken to the government and then to the

local courts, causing a commotion of proportions unseen in Chidambaram's recent history.

"This is a fabricated story," decries B. Kadhiresan, a lecturer of English at nearby Annamalai University and a member of the Organization for the Protection of Hindu Temples. "This is the main temple that historically promoted the Tamil language and also the singing of *devarams*. The songs, scribed on palm leaves, were hidden here in hostile times. When the Cholas took over, the *dikshitars* handed them the *devarams*, and the kings made them public."

Why, then, did antagonism arise between the *dikshitars* and Arumugaswami? Kadhiresan says that it was not a matter of linguistics. "This gentleman wanted to be in the holy *chit sabha*, the chamber of Lord Nataraja, and sing during the puja. But for mystical and traditional reasons, no one is ever allowed in the *sabha* during puja except for the *dikshitar* who is the *pujari* on that particular day, not even other *dikshitars*! But Arumugaswami tried to bully his way to the *sabha*."

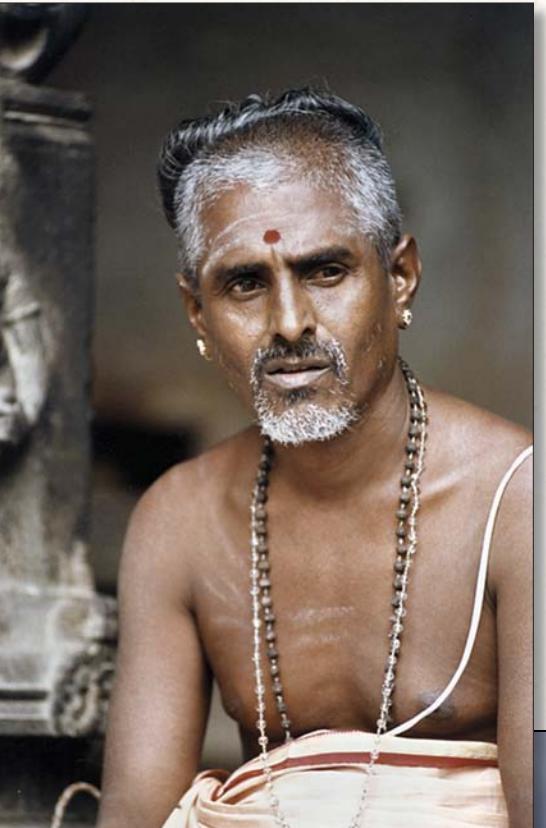
The tensions and interests involved more than it is apparent to the average devotee, as it draws on ideological and political factions. In Tamil Nadu, there is a strong movement to install Tamil as the language of worship in temples, decrying Sanskrit as outdated and elitist. The supporters of this theory, often Marxists and members of the government, see temples as social institutions, places created to serve the people who gather to practice their beliefs.

The other side of the language debate sees temples as places of power built to invoke the blessings of the Gods, sanctuaries

for mystical communion using techniques and precise Sanskrit mantras revealed by the ancient rishis. Abandoning the liturgy of the worship, in their opinion, would cause its potency to wane and the temple itself to fade into a soulless edifice of stone.

It is not a genteel debate, and arguments can be inflammatory. Dr. Thiagarajan Rajagopal, former head of the Sanskrit department at Presidency College in Chennai and a renowned singer, asks, "The Tamil Nadu government claims to be an atheist government. What right does it have to interfere with matters of worship?"

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Somber thoughts: Faithful servants of Lord Nataraja, most *dikshitars* say they wish they could solely worship Him; (below) Chidambaram Temple tank on an overcast day



CLARE ARNI





Discredited and Vulnerable

The incident with the *oduvar* at Chidambaram provided ample ammunition for the interventionist camp. The *dikshitars*, a reclusive community with no media savvy, were easy prey to the campaign of disinformation that followed. Rumors abound, a popular one being that the *dikshitars* wanted to forbid spoken Tamil even in conversations inside the temple complex. TV stations as far as Malaysia showed the *dikshitars* as a clique of decadent, money-grabbing priests who ran an unkempt temple with filthy walls and unfriendly services. With a sweeping media spin against them, the *dikshitars*, few of whom speak English, did not stand a chance.

The *oduvar*, backed by a mandate from the state court, was finally allowed to sing just as he wished, while the *dikshitars* just stopped the puja and waited before they would proceed. One hot-tempered young *dikshitar* did not take this well. Far from the eyes of the crowd, he gave Arumugaswami a beating—providing more fuel for the fires of criticism. Dr. Ananda Nataraja, a *dikshitar* who currently works as a professor of Tamil language at Annamalai University, observes, “That was the mistake of one particular *dikshitar*. The community tried to protect him, which I

Modest life: Ramu Dikshitar and his family in the only room of his house, a 200-square-foot area that is at once living room, kitchen and bedroom for them all

A century apart: (opposite page) A young *dikshitar*'s photo from a book published exactly 100 years ago, in 1909, and its contemporary counterpart (right) exemplify the *dikshitars*' respect for tradition

think was wrong. The governing body of the *dikshitars*, however, publicly criticized his actions.”

Cries of mismanagement escalated. The temple itself, in its state of relative decay, was pointed to by critics as evidence of that. The HINDUISM TODAY team also took notice of the dirty pillars and stained stones. They stand as a paradox, a contrasting background to the priests who, undeniably, have a strong affection for the temple.

A new canard took flight, its source unknown, about jewels being missing from the Lord Nataraja Deity, supposedly stolen or lost by the priests. Though government officials mentioned this freely in conversations, none made a formal charge or produced evidence. The *dikshitars* deemed the accusation absurd, because all jewels are accounted for daily. Still, this cascade of slandering further eroded the standing of the beleaguered priests.



A Long-Planned Takeover

The Tamil Nadu government's decades-long interest in Chidambaram Temple is notorious. In India, administration of temples follows state law, not federal law. Tamil Nadu has an estimated 38,000 Hindu temples, with all but the smallest ones run by the government—and Chidambaram was the last big one outside the system.



RAJIV MALIK



EDGAR THURSTON

groups, including Sri Kunchitapatham, leader of the Tamil Nadu Hindu Temple Protection Committee, and the BJP's state leader Sri L. Ganesan. Though most participants of the peaceful demonstration came from Tamil Nadu, Siva devotees from all over the world could be seen marching the streets.

Inexplicably, the HINDUISM TODAY news crew found no other reporters present to record the people's opinion, just as with the *oduvar* incident earlier. Distressed, senior *dikshitar* Sri N. Srimulalingam lamented, “Not a single English-language newspaper bothered to cover the event. This shows how our media is completely biased and is suppressing the voice and aspirations of *dikshitar* community.” His concerns echoed the

insecurity that prevailed among the priests. “There seems to be a deep-rooted conspiracy behind the takeover of Chidambaram Temple. It is one of the strongest pillars of Saivism, and this is going to adversely affect the spiritual rituals and practices.”

The march lifted the spirits of those against the takeover, but so far it seems to have had little real effect. Judge Banumathi said she saw no grounds to review her ruling of the case. As far as state law goes, the takeover is now irreversible.

Finally, emboldened by current circumstances, on February 2, 2009 the Tamil Nadu government appointed an Executive Officer with ample powers to oversee the temple in all aspects. On that same evening, the officer arrived at Chidambaram.

Protesting in the Streets

The *dikshitars* immediately appealed the takeover, but the Chennai high court judge, Ms. Banumathi, upheld the decision. Popular outcry quickly followed.

On March 25, over 6,000 devotees joined a protest march and rally, demanding a reversal of the takeover. Braving the hot weather, a crowd of men, women and children chanted slogans and carried signs demanding, “Leave the temple!” Many waved flags representing Hinduism, with *kolams* or Nandi, Siva's mount, and often the whole crowd chanted a reverberating “Aum Namasivaya” that resonated along the streets of the small temple-town.

Leaders of the community, who co-organized the event, marched representing their

The people's voice: A rally brought thousands to the streets, protesting against the takeover and chanting “Aum Namasivaya”

of the temple is illegal, unethical and finds no support in holy scripture.”

Living for Lord Nataraja

In between a frenetic schedule of meetings, Rajiv found some time to visit the temple as a pilgrim, experiencing it firsthand. He talked to other pilgrims and to a few *dikshitars* there, who, comfortable in their element, had much to say.

The *dikshitars* are a temple priesthood like no other in modern India. They bring a sense of timelessness to their work, their tradition and the management of the temple. Little or nothing has changed in their ways in the last centuries, even as much of their world has eroded away. Many pilgrims express the opinion that their most distinguished trait is their degree of devotion. They consider themselves to be the slaves, the keepers, the foremost devotees of Lord Nataraja.

For them, Chidambaram is the center of Lord Siva's universe. During the daily puja, they believe, a pulse is sent to the far reaches of Earth, the life current without which the cosmos would cease to exist.

To a devout Hindu with an open heart, the sublime shakti of Chidambaram Temple is magnificent. The temple halls are hallowed by numerous saints who worshiped here over the centuries; a divine presence is felt everywhere.

Dikshitars perform their pujas in groups of four to six priests. Only one is the main *pujari* for the day, assigned on a rotating schedule that takes about a year to bring another opportunity. The task is approached with reverent anticipation. In the course of a day, *dikshitars* perform all tasks, big and small—from exquisite chanting of the Vedas, using a liturgy that is exclusive to Chidambaram, to lighting lamps, carrying offerings and guarding the temple at night. They know of



RAJIV MALIK



The Supreme Dancer: (above) An artist's rare close-up of Lord Nataraja's serene smile; (below) the temple complex covers 160,000 m², or 40 acres

no other life.

Also present are many priests who approach guests, offering services, sometimes with the energetic insistence of an aggressive salesman, sometimes with the noble composure of a seasoned *dikshitar*. The outstretched hands are unsettling, creating an air of commerce that is not welcomed by most pilgrims and diminishes their regard for the priests. U. Usha, a housewife, complained, "Dikshitars are a little money-minded. They need to change their attitude."

In the traditional system, the relationship between the devotee and the *dikshitar* is personal, and payment for services is direct. There is little pooled income and the priests must find their own sponsors for the *pujas*. They are forced to spend much of their time looking for donors, which, according to many priests, is an unfortunate necessity contrary to their heritage.

"My aim in life is to serve Lord Nataraja. He is always giving life and energy. We crave His blessings only," says Ramu Dikshitar, 52. Ramu's bright smile gives way to an expression of anguish when he talks about the *dikshitar*'s financial situation, lightening up again only when he speaks of Lord Nataraja.

Ramu and his family, six in all, live in a single, small, dilapidated room (see photo on page 28). Resting on the room's only furniture, a swing-like board held by chains, with his two sons who are apprentices of the priestly craft, Ramu wept while he spoke. "Our whole aim is to serve Lord Nataraja and his devotees. We have never demanded any money from the government. We want to do our *pujas* with freedom. We are facing a

very critical situation today. The Hindu community should come forward. We are not thieves or robbers. We are in the service of Lord Nataraja. Please help us."

A typical *dikshitar* makes between Rs. 1,000 and 2,000 a month—or US\$42 at most to support his entire family. The temple's donations in the form of food and rice grain are shared by all. The rice comes from lands that belong to the temple, but only a handful of farmers actually pay their dues. Even when they do pay, they do so with inferior grains. "I do not think many of the people who criticize the *dikshitars* as exploiters would be able to eat the rice which they consume every day," observes S. Rajasekaran, a leading local businessman. "If you see it, you don't feel like eating it at all."

There is hope in the hearts of a few that the takeover might

improve the economic situation of the priesthood. In most temples run by the government, priests have a fixed salary. But each temple follows a different arrangement, and for Chidambaram this is not in the plan so far. The government's investments are limited to improving the grounds, and a new official *hundi* (donation box) is thought to be diverting to the state donations that would

normally go to the priests, making the situation worse for them.

The Dikshitars' History

The *dikshitars*' predicament is sad but also puzzling. This is, after all, a legendary temple, with an original staff of 3,000 priests—among whom, it is said, was Lord Siva Himself. It was in this grove of *tillai* trees that saints Vyagrapada and Patanjali worshiped the Lingam and witnessed Siva's unsullied *ananda tandava*, the cosmic dance of bliss. Mr. V. Sundaram, a former officer of the Indian Administrative Service and a journalist, shed some light on the history of the *dikshitars* and the reasons behind their hardships.

According to him, in ancient times, each reigning maharaja successively added to the wealth and glory of his kingdom's temples, which were the epicenters of their empires. Temples were where the kingdom's populace worshiped, but also socialized, conducted business and met with government officials. Temples were unmediated courts of law, where truthful contract agreements could be made, because in front of the Deities few would dare to lie.

In those times, the priesthoods of major temples were partially sponsored by the raja's government, while retaining a high degree of independence. No temple would deny the monarch's personal requests or affront temporal power, but tradition itself—the system of *jatis*, or occupational clans—created a separation between the government and the clergy. A temple's administration stayed

in the hands of its priests.

Mr. V. Sundaram explains that Lord Siva Nataraja of Chidambaram was given lands and properties that would serve as an endowment to the temple, a source of steady income designed to last forever. Sometimes, gifts were given to the *dikshitars* as a group. Copper plates found by the Archeological Survey of India record a gift from King Rajendra Chola to the *dikshitars* in 1120 CE, a whole village awarded in recognition of their devotion. By the early 1800s, the temple owned 5,500 acres. Because the priests are not allowed to work in agriculture themselves, peasant families grew crops on Nataraja's lands, paying part of their harvest as rent. The system provided bountiful offerings and tranquility to the priests.

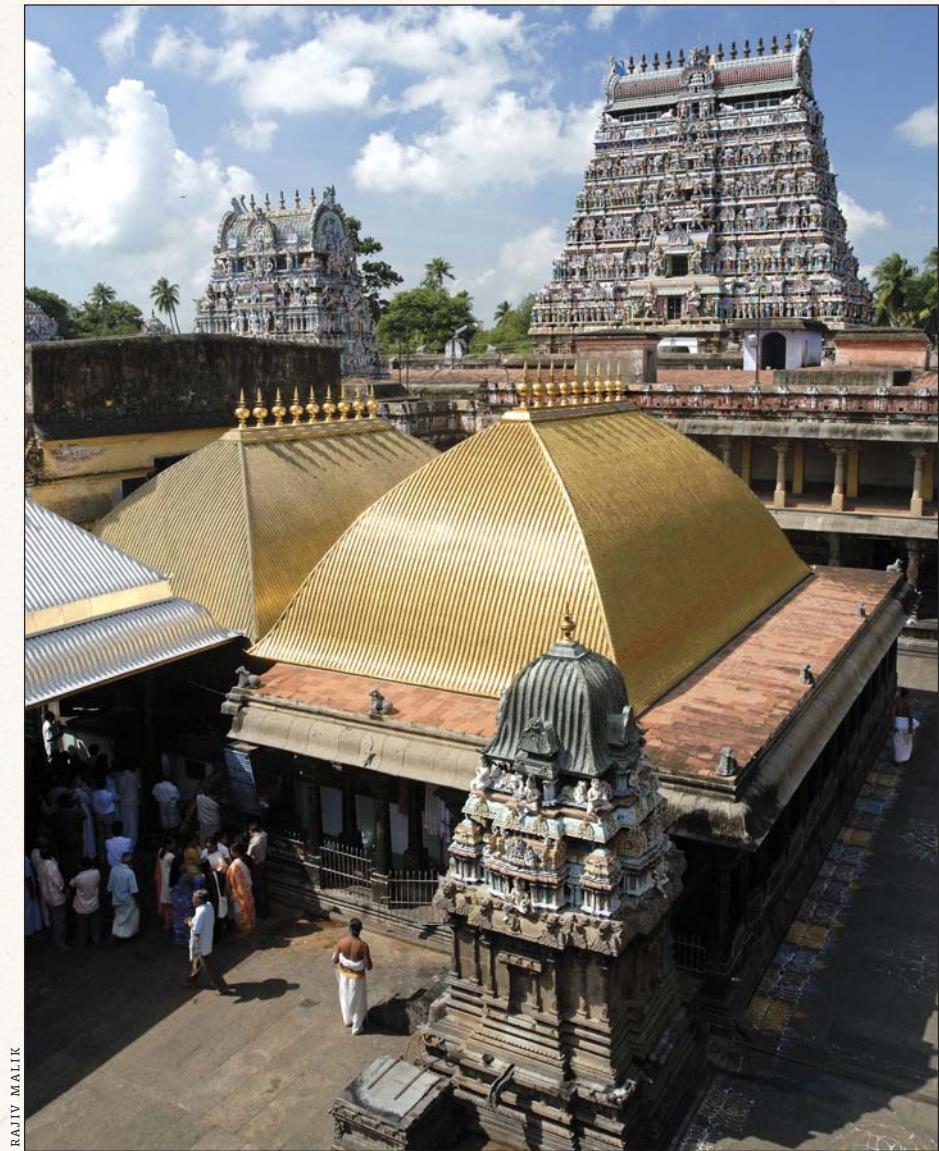
When the maharajas fell, the British East India Company initially upheld the existing system. They were inclined to respect the private property records of the late empires, including the vast expanses of land owned by temples. A temple's land was traditionally registered under the name of the main Deity—at Chidambaram, it was "Nataraja." But the British, who were disdainful of Hinduism and ignorant of the ways of the land, helped pave the way for usurpers and opportunists. It came to pass that any person named "Nataraja" could claim some of the temple's land as his, and be granted lawful rights.

Gradually, families who lived on temple lands became less inclined to pay their rents, going from a third, to a fifth, to a tenth, to nothing. Many claimed (and won) hereditary rights over the land, arguing that their family had occupied it for generations. Ancient laws, which decreed that the estate of a single person with no heirs should be given to Lord Nataraja, were spurned and ignored. With landed revenues depleted, the temple priests fell to a state of uncertainty and near pauperdom.

The Priests Today

If in the old days 3,000 priests worked to keep the temple clean and the vibration pristine, the diminished ranks of today, with just 373, are woefully deficient. In fact, much of the criticism aimed at the *dikshitars* is a direct result of their impoverishment and decimated ranks. It is a vicious cycle that only brings further decay.

There are, among the *dikshitars*, some who face the challenge with a full heart and dignified forbearance. S. Kailasa Sankara Dikshitar, 52, keeps an inner perspective, seeing not financial, but mystical missteps behind the problems. "Since 1957, we dropped many of the traditional ways. We do not perform a ghee *abhishekam* to the *sphatika* (crystal) lingam anymore. We abandoned certain rites that are expensive. We have even missed *kumbhabhishekams* and performed



Center of the Saivite Universe: The *chit sabha*, "hall of consciousness," at the heart of the temple, houses Lord Nataraja. Its 21,600 solid gold tiles represent the number of breaths a person takes in a day. (below) S. Kailasa Sankara Dikshitar.

them on the wrong dates. Our rites deal with forces of the cosmos. I feel that if we solve this, it will have a positive effect on the Tamil people, in Sri Lanka and in the world."

D. Raja Dikshitar, a young mystic of 25, explains what it means to be a *dikshitar*, whether the times are good or bad: "We are connected to the Lord all the time. My life and my temple activities cannot be separated. Even as babies, when we drank milk from our mothers, we were creating a commitment to this divine task."

A New Commissioner

Mrs. N. Thirumagal, from the Hindu Re-





ligious & Charitable Endowments, is the strong woman now in charge of the male hereditary priesthood. She began her work quietly, taking on the least controversial projects first—with one exception. She placed a *hundi* in Chidambaram Temple, defying a centuries-old tradition, a point of contention that is seen by many as physical evidence of who is now in charge. But Mrs. Thirumagal has otherwise tried to listen to the opinions of the *dikshitars* and find common ground. "We wanted to build a tank at a small Sri Vinayaka shrine in the corner, where breaking coconuts has become untidy. Since the *dikshitar* who is the *pujari* of that shrine objected, we cancelled the project," she shares.

Emotions still run high in the chaotic and wavering moods common to the aftermath of confrontation. Some *dikshitars* avoid any contact with the new commissioner; others have gone so far as honoring her with a shawl. Mrs. Thirumagal is not the stereotypical stone-hearted, anti-Hindu marxist, but a devout Hindu, and that blurs the lines of the quarrel.

Still, her commitment to her job is unflinching. She speaks with pride of her previous work at Kapaleshwar Temple in Mylapore: "During my term as a deputy commissioner there, the temple's yearly income went from US\$312,000 to US\$1.5 million. I also renovated the temple. How is it possible that Chidambaram, a world-famous temple, had an insignificant income last

year?" Kapaleshwar Temple is today often mentioned as an example of good governance, with high standards for cleanliness and organization.

She has ambitious plans, mostly related to administration and maintenance. Some of the improvements, such as cleaning, are widely supported. But her financial strategies will change the dynamics of Chidambaram and put an end to customs that date back to the Chola empire, conforming it to the other government-run temples in the state. The main innovations are charging for admission and creating VIP passes with special privileges—which are common in India.

G. Kunjithapatham, 59, President of the Hindu Temple Protection Committee and one of the organizers of the rally, summarizes the most common concerns. "We go to the temple to worship the Lord and to have His darshan. In front of God, everybody is the same. In this temple, so far, there is no distinction between VIPs and commoners. Here, anyone can stand anywhere and have darshan for as long as they want."

V. Chandrasekaran, Secretary of Tamil Nadu Brahmins Association, adds, "All the pujas here are performed at their proper time. Even if a minister comes, the pujas will not be disturbed; once the temple is closed, no one is allowed. But in other temples, if an important official comes, they tell the *archakas* to open the temple. Pujas are delayed for hours, waiting for such VIPs. At Chid-

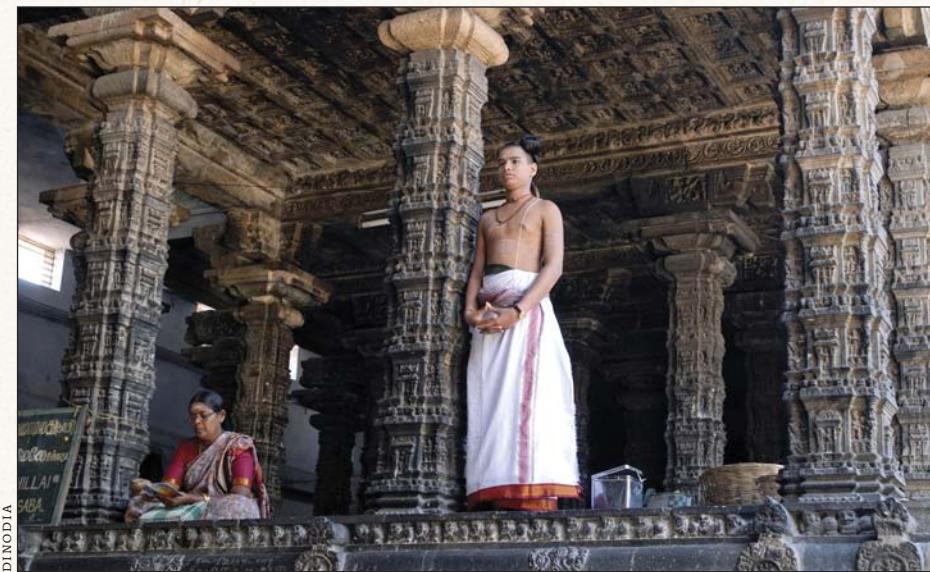
ambaram, the *dikshitars* respect not just the money but also the devotion of the pilgrims."

The *dikshitars* are singular in their organization, one of the world's oldest functioning democracies. In their assemblies, each *dikshitar* has one vote, sometimes giving equal weight to the opinions of father and son. It is still uncertain how control will now be shared with the new commissioner.

Though the first months of the new power-sharing arrangement brought few changes, uncertainty and fear of the future are common among the *dikshitars* interviewed. S. Thillai Nagarathina Dikshitar explained, "If the temple stops making *prasadam* food available to us, we will be in trouble. The temple provides food to all the 373 families, regardless of status and position. Two thirds of the families are so poor that they cannot survive without the food they get from the temple."

Uncertain Future

The next step, according to B. Kumar, the *dikshitars*' lawyer, is to take the case to federal courts. The argument is that the *dikshitars* are a minority protected by constitutional laws. "It is a crystal-clear case. The rights of denominations are safeguarded under the constitution. The bench said that the *podhu dikshitars* are a denomination and are entitled to the management of their institution." In Indian law, denominations, or micro-minorities as they are sometimes called, are



Weight of tradition: A devotee and a young priest at the *Natya Sabha*, the hall of dance

small groups that share a common heritage and are the living embodiment of a tradition that needs to be preserved. As B. Kumar explains, "This is not a temple where there are just ten *pujaris*. They are 373 families. That is why, in 1952, the state bench decreed that the *podhu dikshitars* are entitled to remunerate themselves using the donations given to the temple. It is a community prohibited by tradition from taking any other remunerated job. If a *podhu dikshitar* takes any other

avocation, he is disqualified from sharing the proceeds."

B. Kumar also considers the financial situation of the *dikshitars* an important point in their defense against the accusations of mismanagement. According to him, "It is incorrect to say that the *dikshitars* are living in luxurious conditions, or getting rich. This distinction is very vital. No act of mismanagement was ever proven in court."

The proceedings of the case may take

years. Meanwhile, Chidambaram is likely to remain under governmental control.

For the Tamil Nadu government, this means that all noteworthy temples are under state management, but only as far as the Hindu religion is concerned—the houses of worship of all other religions have so far been left undisturbed. Our correspondent Rajiv Malik inquired if there is a plan to continue to also take over mosques and churches. Mrs. Thirumagal said, "I cannot comment on why only Hindu institutions or temples are taken over. It is basically a government's decision. But wherever mismanagement is taking place, we will take over." It is a position that draws criticism. Dr. Thiagarajan Rajagopalam denounces, "If the government is taking over Hindu temples, can it claim to be a secular government? Under the garb of secularism, the government is silent about the administration of any temple of other religions. This is wrong. A full takeover of property that does not belong to the government is tantamount to stealing the temple."

The *dikshitar*'s—and Chidambaram's—future is unsettled. How will their woes be solved, and how will their heritage survive, only Lord Nataraja may say. All is His dance, and though some of His steps are fierce, the *dikshitars* know well it is also an infinite dance of bliss.

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO DR. V. MANICKAVEL, TAMIL INTERPRETER
DIKSHITARS MAY BE REACHED AT
TILLAIBRAHMINS@YAHOO.COM

T.R. Ramesh, the Dikshitars' Representative

What is it, in Indian law, that allows the government to take over religious institutions?

The draconian section 45 of Tamil Nadu's Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowments Act provides sweeping powers to appoint an Executive Officer to "manage the secular affairs" of a public temple. But denominations, like the *dikshitars*, are protected by the Indian Constitution, entitled to survive and maintain their unique identity.

Is Chidambaram the only temple fighting against intervention in Tamil Nadu?

Chidambaram is the last one, except for temples belonging to maths, which can only be audited, not managed by the state.

Why oppose the government?

First, because with their interference corruption becomes widespread. Second, the government is interested only in revenues. They have no intention of observing tradition or preserving our rites and culture. Temple revenues, which are offerings



Speaking for the priests: Ramesh, an attorney, represents the *dikshitars* in Chennai

N. Thirumagal, the Government's Commissioner

What is your background as a temple commissioner?

I was a law graduate and practiced as a lawyer for seven years. More recently, I managed the Kapaleshwar Temple. I work at a state department overseeing Hindu religious institutions, where we manage around 38,000 temples in Tamil Nadu. Most big temples are being administered by deputy commissioners like me. The department is headed by a senior officer of the Indian Administrative Service, but I am not affiliated with the IAS.

What has changed since the takeover?

We installed a *hundi*, and also focused on cleaning. There were dirty walls and garbage. We also fixed the drainage system.

What are the future plans?

We are getting in touch with those who have leases of land belonging to Chidambaram. We want to make sure their leases are properly paid. We want also to improve the lighting in the temple, set up a security system and develop the sur-



Faith and justice: Mrs. Thirumagal believes that she is helping the temple, which she holds as sacred

rounding gardens. We plan to create a website, renovate the 1000-pillared *mandapam* which is today closed, and provide proper facilities for visitors.

Will the *dikshitars* be consulted about your decisions?

The administration of the temple will be done by us together. They will be heard as trustees. The administration is run by me as the executive officer with a trustee board. We will look for agreement in our relationship with the *dikshitars*.

What will change for the *dikshitars* regarding the donations?

I do not think they will be much affected economically. Whatever is offered to them on the puja plates would be available to them. I guarantee there will be no change in that. Some *archakas* can also be paid servants, receiving both a salary and the puja tray offerings. Revenue coming out of *hundi* will be utilized for the development of the temple. In fact, we do not know what is the exact income of the Chidambaram Temple.

Friendship Evangelism

Hindus, especially young students at universities, need to be alert to insidious Christian tactics

BY MARUTHU PANDIAN DHARMALINGAM

THE SUBTLE CONVERSION PROGRAM WHICH CHRISTIANS call "friendship evangelism" is becoming a common experience for Hindus of all age groups. It is an active force on Malaysian university campuses. The main targets are Hindu students between the ages of 21 and 30 who are often unaware of the ulterior motives behind "friendships" initiated by Christian peers. We need a more alert, informed Hindu student body or we will see more and more young Hindus being cleverly converted to Christianity even before they realize it.

I was just 21 when I enrolled in a Kuala Lumpur medical school in 2001. My mother was terminally ill and hospitalized. She died the following week. I was grieving and depressed. Upperclassmen are assigned as "fosters" to help orient freshmen. One foster started giving me attention and soon became my closest campus friend, developing a three-year relationship during which he tried his best to convert me to Christianity. Freshmen coming from an innocent, sheltered home environment are very open. I was no different. A new friendship is accepted as a comforting source of security in a new world outside of home. From his name I knew he was Christian, but initially religion did not factor into the friendship. Besides, I had always respected and mixed freely with people of various religions and traditions.

In the beginning he helped me during difficult times and I cherished his kindness and still do. He loaned me things I needed, such as medical books. After gaining my close friendship, he started inviting me to Christian faith-based activities: barbecue parties, picnics, pre-exam prayer sessions, etc., and a Methodist gathering, held weekly only five minutes from campus. There I observed many newcomers who were Hindus like me. They had been brought by fosters from other colleges. I began to realize what was going on, but as a gesture of respect, I stayed throughout the events, just observing. In such crowds one hears criticisms of Hinduism, of caste, vegetarianism, the Gods, etc. Despite this, my foster claimed that he belonged to the Pillai caste. And while making fun of Hindu vegetarianism, he was vegetarian on Christian holy days such as Lent. This did not make me despise him or break off the relationship. But I continued to observe him closely.

After about six months, he took another step by inviting me to go with him from Kuala Lumpur to visit his family home for Christmas in Penang, a northern Malaysian state. I was excited. It would be the first Christmas function I ever attended and also my first trip to Penang Island. I looked forward to some sightseeing and a party during my three-day holiday. But it was so much more than that!

During this and subsequent trips to Penang throughout our three-year friendship, I learned all about my friend's family. It turned out



his father was a Methodist pastor, though the family did not put forward that identity in Penang. They ran a flour mill named Ambal Flour Mill and conducted business with Penang Hindus and the Hindu temple next to their mill. The mother taught Tamil to local Hindu children. She told me that one of her goals is to teach Christianity to kids. But I did not see them doing overt Christian ministry in Penang.

Meanwhile, the family was conducting Christian activities 200 km away in the State of Perak, Matang District, actively converting Hindus in the area and raising money for their mission work. Here, in a Hindu village, they maintained a newly built Church in which the father preached every Sunday, and they had begun building a new small mission center nearby. Most Sunday attendees were Hindu adults and children from the neighborhood.

The pastor was retired and his wife was a Tamil tutor. The mill business was small. Yet the family had a good standard of living, was maintaining the church, building the new mission center, covering travel expenses and the cost of books and mission supplies. All this seemed to me beyond their means, making me suspect they were

receiving funds from overseas.

After Christmas day, I received a gift from the family. "This is a special gift. Do not open it until you are back home in Kuala Lumpur." It was a Christian Bible. It had a cover letter that I remember to this day. It read, "You are saved only by accepting Jesus Christ as your personal savior. They say your sins are washed away by taking a dip in the Ganges. No. There is no truth in Hindu religion. Jesus Christ died for our sins, you must accept him personally, too!" One by one, conversion stories came up in my mind that I had read when I was 10 to 12 years old in the *Shakti* magazines collected by my father. I realized, "Oh yes, this is a very similar case!"

I was not angry at my friend or his family, because it's what they were trained to do, and I somewhat anticipated it. But I was hurt and offended; he knew I was a practicing Hindu and he also knew my family members well, yet he still pushed to make me a Christian. It also surprised me that no one in my family was concerned about the activities that this Christian was getting me involved in. My dad treated him as a son, without any bias because of his religion. My siblings were glad to have a "doctor" friend. I was sad to see them extend a genuine heart and hospitality toward someone who was ultimately trying to alienate me from my own family, and who would take the next step to convert them, too, one by one, through me!

After learning about the true intentions behind his friendship, it was difficult to associate and study with him. I maintained a cordial relationship, even though I was certainly not going to convert. But after my father died in 2003, it became clear to me that my younger siblings would be vulnerable to the young man's influence. Their Hindu faith would certainly be undermined if I maintained the relationship. So I completely disassociated myself from him.

A number of my friends have been influenced by friendship evangelism, and some have converted. This happens primarily

because there is little basic Hindu education on campus. University Hindu societies appear to be ignorant of the problem and are focused more on social service and entertainment activities rather than pursuing activities that deepen the understanding of Hindu religion. Never at a single Hindu event that I ever attended did anyone highlight the problem of Christian friendship ministry, even though it was going on all around them. A related issue is interfaith love marriages that occur on campus. I have never met a Christian-Hindu couple in which the Hindu can practice his/her faith freely. In fact, more often than not, the Hindu is required to renounce his or her Hindu faith.

These groups never target Muslims. They know that the Malaysian Government's tough Islamic law would have them arrested or banned altogether if such evangelization were to happen among Muslims. Apparently Hindus are considered a soft target.

As a Hindu, I believe all religions are good, but they are not the same. Because I was brought up a knowledgeable Hindu and was informed about Christian tactics for converting Hindus, I was able

to save myself and my family.

Having been exposed to Islam in a Muslim majority country and bombarded by evangelical Christians, I have come to realize that, by comparison, the Hindu religion is the greatest. Hinduism is gentle, God-centric, emphasizing experience of God rather than mere beliefs and, above all, it has genuine respect for all other religions.

The only way to counter Christian friendship ministry's destructive impact on Hindus is by imparting more knowledge to Hindus. That can and should start at a very young age, as it did in my own case. Parents should be alert to the associations their children have at university. Even though university students are mature and independent, and parents are reluctant to interfere in their lives, I would encourage mothers and fathers to discuss the issues of maintaining their Hindu heritage in the face of pressure from their Christian friends and peers.

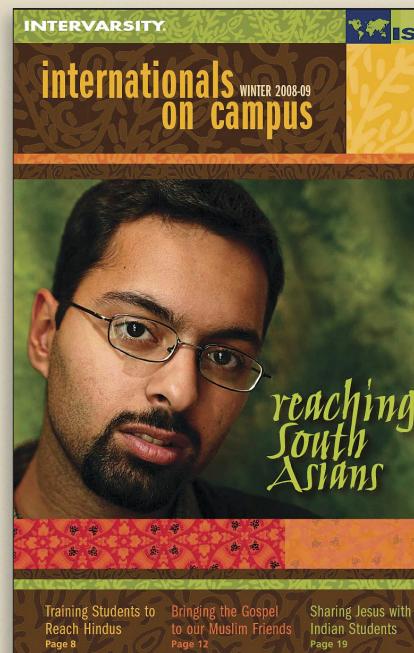
MARUTHU PANDIAN DHARMALINGAM, MD, 29, is a physician in Malaysia who spends his free time working for Hindu causes

ISM Targets US South Asian Students

THE INTERVARSITY CHRISTIAN Fellowship began at the University of Cambridge, England, in 1877. It spread to Canada in 1928 and to the US in the late 1930s. In 1941 the Christian groups formalized their associations in the US and Intervarsity/USA was born. Today it comprises over 33,000 students on 577 campuses in the US with a well developed International Student Ministry (ISM, see: <http://www.intervarsity.org/ism/>).

While professing high-minded motives based on "a response to God's love for all people," ISM members are dedicated to what this magazine's founder, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, described as "infiltrating, diluting and destroying" the faith of their fellow Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Buddhist students through "friendship evangelism." Indian students comprise the highest number of foreign students on US campuses, and ISM has set its conversion sights on Hindu and Muslim youth.

Infiltrating: ISM's online resources and the winter 2008-2009 issue of their publication *Internationals on Campus* read like training manuals for subversives, turning Christian students into duplicitous moles. Infiltration of Hindu organizations and young Hindu minds is the first step. Evelyn Stephens writes, "As a student group, we encourage our members to be a part of the Hindu student club on campus. Together we go to their festivals and parties. We also attend important community functions like dance recitals and Diwali. In these ways, we connect to the culture and have a natural meeting place to de-



velop friendships with Hindus.... Once the friendships are formed, it is important to train students to go deeper in friendships and really get to know one another through giving to and receiving from our Hindu friends."

Diluting: Hindus can often be persuaded to add Jesus to their pantheon of "n + 1 Gods." But ISM recommends the soft-sell. "Do not press 'Jesus is the only way' too soon in your relationship, since it may break trust and not allow you to tell more about Jesus. Pray for the right

time when you will be able to allow Jesus' words to explain why he is the way to God, so that your Hindu friends wrestle with Jesus, rather than with you."

Destroying: Make no mistake—behind all the sugar-coated empathy, the goal of these students is to destroy their Hindu or Muslim friends' faith and beliefs. "Satyavan" wraps up the publication with an article addressing idol worship. He writes, "These Hindus may have opened themselves up to evil influence as they worshiped falsely. Certainly, Hindus must deal with idolatry in their lives, and as they come to Christ and submit to him as disciples, those idols will have to fall away. He is God of gods and demands that central place in their lives, my life and yours."

The Hindu Challenge: ISM admits that conversion of Hindus is challenging. They explain that even nominally Hindu Indian students are usually more religious than most Christians and may view Christian social activities as shallow. Paradoxically, ISM teaches Christian students to impress Hindus by becoming more religious themselves. "Exposing and living out our personal devotion to the Lord Jesus rather than preaching is the most effective way to share faith among Hindus. Work into your life the traditional Hindu (and biblical) values of simplicity, renunciation (fasting), spirituality and humility."

Download a copy of the PDF for a complete overview of these wily and unethical strategies: www.hinduismtoday.com/campus-ministry/. And check your membership rolls for Christian evangelicals!

America's Second Generation of Hindus

How young Hindu Americans are finding their faith while confronting the pressures of life

BY TRISHUL SIDDHARTHAN

MY EARLIEST MEMORIES WERE PACKING UP OUR CAR ON Sunday mornings and driving for forty-five minutes to a small temple in north Miami. The swirl of brightly colored saris, the strong aromas of incense and *prasadam* and the children of the other Hindu families were essential parts of my upbringing, vastly different from my parents'. Returning to the new temple fifteen years later, I wondered what had pushed some of those children away from our ancient religion and culture, and what had inspired others to incorporate it into their American life. I sat down with two fellow students, each a senior and a member of the Hindu Students Council (HSC) at the University of Miami, to learn why they promote Hinduism and its values.

Janki Amin described Hinduism as "Seeing Bhagavan, or God, in every person, in every living thing and in the world, and appreciating what God has given you and using it to leave an impact in the world." Describing how this practice has fit into her life, she shared, "Hinduism is open to interpretation, and it has an ability to mold into each person's life the way they want it to; it is not so clear-cut."

Pravin Patel shared a similar understanding: "Hinduism is a way of life, but it is what you want to make of it. The scriptures teach us a lot of things, but they are open to interpretation. You can extract whatever you want and integrate it into your life in your own way. Hinduism as a religion is very open and accepting. It teaches you to take the good out of everything and see the good in all other people." It was not until his junior and senior years of college that Pravin became actively involved with the Hindu Students Council, and that was due to the sense of family HSC instilled. "I attended maybe two HSC meetings my freshman year and a couple last year, but it wasn't until this year that I started coming regularly. Attending meetings brings you into the group and makes you feel at home, even though it is a small number of people. The meetings brought me into the HSC family, and I wanted to get more involved."

Janki, who became involved with the Hindu Students Council early in college, echoed Pravin's feeling about the sense of family: "When I first came to the University of Miami, everyone was scoping out clubs to join, and one of the first things I was interested in was the Hindu Students Council. Back home, my family is very Hindu. We practice *arati* and *puja*, and my parents taught me all the *shlokas*. Coming here, it was nice to know there was an organization that continues these practices for youth. What got me really involved was the tight-knit community. It was more than just a club or an



Hindu students: Janki Amin and Pravin Patel

organization. It made me feel like I belong; there is something here that reminds me of home. In addition, we discuss relevant topics, such as the role of women in Hinduism, and how to incorporate Hinduism into our daily lives, such as through meditation and breathing techniques. These are things that give you a chance to get out of your daily routine, to reflect and keep Hinduism active in your life during your college years. I think that is one of the hardest things when you are so far away from home, living in a world where it seems like you don't ever sleep and people don't eat properly and are stressed out all the time. For that one hour when everyone is together, we all share in the same mentality and reflect on Hinduism and its importance in our lives.

Just the fact that we are here and taking that time out of the day, we are keeping Hinduism alive."

I concluded our interview by asking both students what kept them close to Hinduism. For Janki, the key to remaining a strong Hindu was an upbringing that included a conscious understanding of the modern relevance of this age-old religious tradition: "Rather than forcefully saying, 'You have to take *arati*, you have to do this, you have to do that,' my mom would explain why it is important, and why it makes you a better person, and why you'll be happier with this in your life. I think that is a better approach than 'Go take *arati*, we're fasting today, we're doing this and we're doing that.' I think that is what makes people run away, because you start to think, 'This is annoying. I don't know why we are doing this.' If someone explains a practice to you and you find the meaning in it, you will do it even if your mom is not present. For me personally, my faith has made so many miraculous things happen in my life, so I want to incorporate it into my life."

Pravin said that in addition to the deep influence of his own upbringing, his fellow students in HSC had reinforced his faith. "There is an open topic, and everyone can voice their opinion. This allows you to share your voice and gain other perspectives. Sometimes when your parents and other authorities tell you things, it is a little harder to buy into, but when you hear it from your peers it is easier to understand. When you think about it, you say, 'Wow, my mom and dad told me that so many years ago, but when another student tells me it makes sense.'"

As we finished our talk in the dormitory hall, I, too, began to gain a better appreciation of how faith has influenced our paths. I thought back to my childhood, running through the temple grounds with my friends. I thought about the hectic exam schedule, during which this interview was conducted. Talking about our faith brought a sense of normalcy to our lives. For our generation, it was not until college that these lessons and experiences became concrete and formed the foundation of our Hindu faith. While we were exposed to an entirely new setting with its own culture and values, many of us reverted back to the stability of our upbringing, instilled with the firm understanding of our religion. In turn, we hope to impart these values and beliefs to the next generation.

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CHAPTER 3

Hinduism Endures: 1100 to 1850

India responded to centuries of Muslim invasion and rule and later British colonization by both armed resistance and spiritual resolve. The country remained overwhelming Hindu despite foreign domination and religious oppression. India was one of the very few ancient societies to survive into modern times with its religion and social structure largely intact.



The Rajput princess Mirabai devoted her life to the joyful worship of Lord Krishna. The poet saint danced and sang throughout North India.

Note to Students, Parents and Teachers

This Educational Insight is the third chapter in our series on Hindu history intended for use in US primary and secondary schools. Most textbooks presenting Indian history between 1100 and 1850 focus on the Muslim and British rule. They tend to ignore the adverse material and religious impact of this rule on Hindus, who made up 80% of the population during most of this period. This chapter is intended to fill this gap and serve as a supplement to other texts, not as a comprehensive overview of all events of this time. It is meant to explain what happened under India's foreign invaders and protracted alien rule and how Hindus, their religion and way of life survived this violent and op-

pressive time. This is a difficult part of history to teach, but necessary for a proper understanding of our modern world.

This lesson was written and designed by the editorial staff of HINDUISM TODAY in collaboration with Dr. Shiva Bajpai, Professor Emeritus of History, California State University, Northridge.

Academic reviewers: Dr. Klaus Klostermaier, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Manitoba; Dr. Jeffrey D. Long, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College; Dr. Anantanand Ramachan, Professor of Religion, St. Olaf College; Dr. T.S. Rukmani, Professor and Chair in Hindu Studies, Concordia University; Dr. Michael K. Ward, Visiting Lecturer in History, California State University, Northridge. Research Assistant: Justin Stein, MA, University of Hawaii, and former middle school teacher in New York.

The Invasion Centuries

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. People today must come to terms with violent times of the past.
2. From the eighth to the eighteenth century, Muslims invaded and then ruled much of India.
3. By the nineteenth century, the British East India Company went from being traders in India to being rulers of India.

The Big Idea

India's Hindus suffered but survived centuries of Muslim and British rule.

HINDUISM TODAY'S Teaching Standards

This column in each of the three sections presents our subject outline for India and Hinduism from 1100 to 1850 ce.

1. Explain the difficulty in discussing violent historical events that continue to impact us today.
2. Describe successive invasions of India by Arabs, Turks and Mughals and the unyielding Hindu resistance.
3. Explore the founding of the Mughal Empire, its expansion and ultimate decline.
4. Explain the origins of the East India Company and how it gained control of India.

If YOU lived then...

Outside invaders have conquered the kingdom next to the one you live in. The king calls for young men to join his army. Your father decides to take the family and flee to another kingdom, away from the fighting. You may either join the army or go with the family. Your father leaves it up to you.

What do you do, and why?

BUILDING BACKGROUND: Horses thrive in Central Asia, Iran and Arabia, but they do poorly in the hot climate of the Indian plains. Invaders on horseback armed with swords and bows had an advantage over the foot soldiers and even the elephants of the Indian armies. Later, Indian kings imported horses yearly for their armies at great cost.

Understanding a Violent Past

We now enter what historians call a "difficult period" of Indian history. The difficulty is not due to any lack of knowledge. The Muslims' invasions of India were carefully chronicled by their own historians. The British also kept exacting records of their **subjugation** and exploitation of the subcontinent. We have a great deal of information, but of a disturbing nature. Muslim historians recount in detail the destruction of cities, sacking of temples, slaughter of noncombatants and enslavement of captives. British accounts reveal the mismanagement and greed that led to **famines** that killed tens of millions of people and ruined the local industry during their rule.

Nearly every country on our planet has a dark period of history it would like to forget or deny. It is difficult to study such unpleasant pasts in a way that leads to understanding, not hatred. Hindu-Muslim discord has been a fact of Indian history for over a thousand years. At the same time, there have been long periods of friendly relationship, especially at the village level. For Hindus and Muslims, coming to terms with their collective past remains a "work in progress." True **reconciliation** comes when people honestly face the past, forgive misdeeds, learn to truly respect each other's religious beliefs and traditions and promise to move forward in peace.

The Gradual Conquest of India

Muslim Arab attacks upon India began in 636 ce, soon after Islam was founded. The first successful conquest was of the Sindh region in 712, with the fall of the temple towns of Debal and Multan. By 870, Arabs conquered the Hindu kingdoms of southwestern Afghanistan, then were stopped by the kings of north and northwest India.

There were three types of conquerors during this time. Some simply raided a city, robbed its wealth and left. Others defeated a kingdom, reinstated the defeated king and ordered him to pay regular **tribute**. The third and most effective conqueror annexed the captured territory to his own kingdom.

The next wave of invasions began around 1000. These attacks were not by Arabs, but by Turks from central Asia who had converted to Islam. One Turkic leader, Mahmud of Ghazni, raided India 17 times between 1001 and 1027. In each city, he looted and destroyed temples, and killed or enslaved inhabitants. Mahmud's successors periodically raided northern India, but generations of Rajput rulers denied the invaders a permanent foothold.

One of the great historians of India, A.L. Basham, wrote that warfare among Hindus was governed by "a chivalrous and humane ethical code, which discouraged such ruthless aspects of war as the sacking of cities and the slaughter of prisoners and noncombatants." The Islamic invasions introduced a brutal form of warfare which destroyed, killed and enslaved enemies at will.

In 1192, Muhammad of Ghur, also Turkic, finally succeeded in defeating Hindu rulers of the Delhi-Ajmer region and the Ganga valley. This conquest led to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206. By 1300, the Sultanate had secured stable rule around their main strongholds of the North, and sent armies to raid as far



south as Thanjavur and Madurai. But these regions were not annexed. Hindu rule generally continued in Rajasthan, Gujarat and thrived in the entire South, notably within the Vijayanagar Empire (1336-1665). Areas with natural protective boundaries, such as Kashmir, Nepal, Assam, Orissa and Kerala, were less subject to raids.

By 1220, the Mongol emperor Genghis Khan had created the largest empire the world had ever seen, conquering Asia from China to Iran. In 1398, a Muslim descendant, Timur, attacked Delhi because he felt its Muslim ruler was too tolerant of

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

subjugation

to bring under control by force

reconciliation

to restore friendly relations

famine

extreme shortage of food

tribute

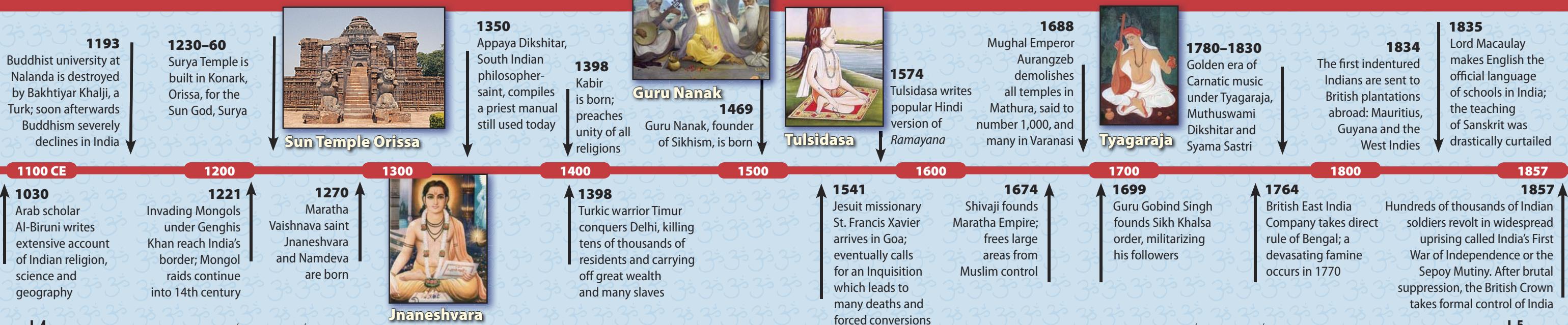
payment made by one ruler to another

Hindus. In just one instance alone, he killed 100,000 Hindu captives. In 1504, Babur, a descendent of both Genghis Khan and Timur, seized Kabul. This gave him a base to attack India. He overwhelmed both the sultan of Delhi (in 1526) and the Rajput confederacy (in 1527) to found the Mughal Empire. His army was the first in India to use **matchlocks** and field cannons.

Babur's grandson, Akbar, became emperor in 1556. He expanded the Mughal Empire over northern India and part of the Deccan by entering into alliances with Hindu kings, particularly the fierce Rajputs. Akbar's rule was noted for its religious harmony. Unfortunately, his successors did not inherit his tolerance. Akbar's great-grandson, Aurangzeb, destroyed temples and reimposed the *jizya* religious tax on Hindus.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire had declined. The Sikhs, Jats, Rajputs, Marathas and the Empire's own provincial governors (called nawabs) had asserted their independence, leaving no strong central government in India. The regional Muslim rulers continued to oppress Hindus, but less harshly than the centralized Muslim governments of Delhi had.

Timeline: 1100 to 1850 ce



The Colonial Period

In 1600 a group of English merchants set up the East India Company to buy and sell goods between Britain, India and other eastern countries. They arrived in India as businessmen, not conquerors, and built major trading posts at Surat, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Over time, they **fortified** their posts and developed private armies for defense, paid for with the immense profits of their trade. They hired Hindus and Muslims as soldiers, called *sepoy*s, who served under British officers.

Emboldened by their strength, the British proceeded to **meddle** in local politics. They gained power and profit by playing one rival against another. The French, especially in South India, did the same. If one king was supported by the French, the Company would back his rival as a way of weakening the French position. But they wanted still more. Robert Clive, commander of the Company's army, conspired to overthrow the Nawab of Bengal, which led to the Nawab's defeat in the Battle of Plassey in 1757.

Mir Jafar, the new Muslim ruler of Bengal rewarded Clive's support with huge gifts and a promise to favor the Company. But things

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

matchlock

an early type of rifle

fortify

to build walls, towers and gates to protect from attack

meddle

to interfere in someone else's affairs

alliance

an agreement to work together

puppet ruler

a state ruler who is actually controlled by another ruler

did not go well, and following the battle of Buxar in 1764 the Company gained control of Bengal's revenues. A few years later they became the direct rulers and ruined the region with heavy taxes, unfair trade restrictions and corrupt practices.

The Company seldom launched a direct attack to conquer a region of India. Rather, they entered into treaties, **alliances** and other deals with local rulers, exploiting the divisions among them. Along the way, they defeated several heroic kings, such as the Muslim king Tipu Sultan of Mysore, and eventually conquered the powerful Marathas and Sikhs after many battles. In this manner, by 1857, they achieved direct rule over much of India and controlled the rest through **puppet rulers**.

Why Did the Muslims and the British Win?

Most historians agree that the Hindu kings simply failed to realize the danger they faced and thus did not mount a common defense. Historians also blame the caste system, saying that people relied solely on the warrior caste to do the fighting. Basham shows this explanation to be inaccurate, as all castes were present in Indian armies. Also, he points out, Muslim kingdoms themselves were overrun by subsequent invaders, such as Timur and Nadir Shah, putting up no better defense than the earlier Hindu kings.

Basham explains that each new invader succeeded by virtue of superior military organization, strategy, training, weapons, horses and mobility. With these they overpowered the large but cumbersome Indian armies, Hindu and Muslim alike, which failed to adapt to new methods of warfare. The British also possessed great military skill and modern weapons, a result of their wars in Europe at the time. The Indian rulers failed to recognize and counter the brilliant British strategy and tactic of conquering a region by exploiting internal divisions among its rulers and only occasionally using its own armed forces in an outright invasion.

Section 1 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

- Explain:** How do we know so much about the destruction in India under the Muslims and British?
- Describe:** What are three different ways that invading forces could profit from their conquests?
- Contrast:** How was the Muslim style of warfare different from that of the Hindus?
- Synthesize:** How could Indian kings have better fought the Muslim invaders and the British empire builders?

FOCUS ON WRITING

- Analyze:** How can studying the history of violence in India be useful in helping to bring about a more peaceful world today?

Surviving a Time of Trial

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Most Muslim rulers were intolerant of other religions, with a few exceptions, such as Akbar.
2. Muslims and Catholics alike worked to convert India's Hindus.
3. During this difficult era, Hinduism remained strong due to the influence of culture and saints.

The Big Idea

Most Hindus remained passionately devoted to Hinduism despite centuries of persecution

Key Terms

polytheism, p. I-8
Sufism, p. I-9
Ajlafs, p. I-9

HINDUISM TODAY'S TEACHING STANDARDS

5. Describe how the saints of the Bhakti Movement were able to inspire Hindus to new levels of religious devotion.
6. Give examples of how religious loyalty and devotion inspired Hindus to resist conversion and alien rule.
7. Analyze the rationale and strategies behind attempts to forcibly convert Hindus to Islam and Christianity.

If YOU lived then...

An army of the Muslim emperor Aurangzeb has just destroyed the temple in your Hindu village. The emperor has also reimposed a heavy tax on Hindus. Your father must always carry a receipt showing he paid the tax or else he could be punished. If your family converts to Islam, he won't be forced to pay the tax.

Do you think your family should convert?

BUILDING BACKGROUND: The Roman Catholic Inquisition took place in the Portuguese trading colony of Goa from 1560 to 1812. Church officials arrested, tortured, tried and executed Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Catholics for breaking Church laws, including restrictions against practicing any religion other than Roman Catholicism.

Hinduism Under Non-Hindu Rule

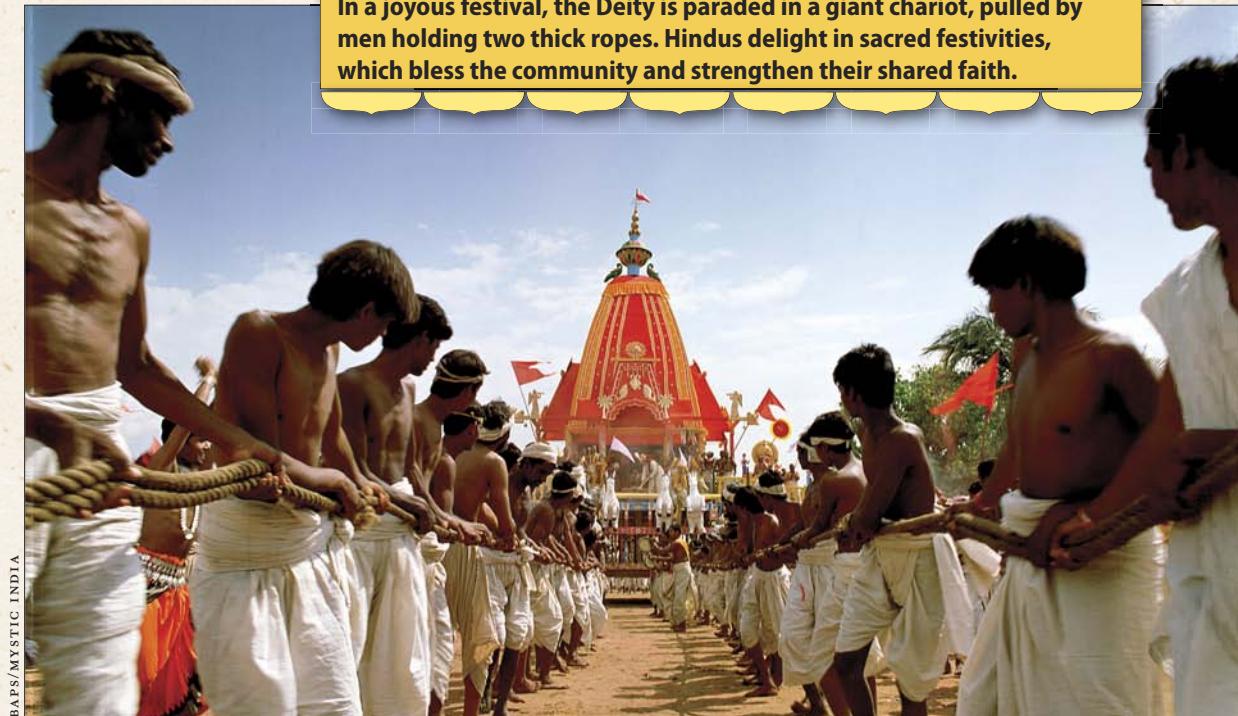
In about 1030, the Muslim scholar Al-Biruni wrote, "The Hindus believe with regard to God that He is eternal, without beginning and end, acting by free will, almighty, all-wise, giving life, ruling, preserving." He explained, "According to Hindu philosophers, liberation is common to all castes and to the whole human race, if their intention of obtaining it is perfect." He described Hindu beliefs, scripture and practices that were little different than those of today. He observed that Hindus were not inclined to war with others for religious reasons and praised India's religious tolerance.

Al-Biruni noted, with approval, that the Muslim raids had "utterly ruined the prosperity of the country." Historians today estimate that between 1000 and 1100 ce, 20 million Indians—ten percent of the population—perished. By the 16th century, tens of millions more died through war and famine, while tens of thousands of temples had been destroyed. Hindus survived this long period of adversity through devotion to God and continued loyalty to community and tradition.

Responding with Devotion

The Bhakti Movement, explained in Chapter Two, was a powerful force throughout our period all over India. It stressed one's personal relationship with God and offered many spiritual practices individu-

In a joyous festival, the Deity is paraded in a giant chariot, pulled by men holding two thick ropes. Hindus delight in sacred festivities, which bless the community and strengthen their shared faith.



BAPS/MYSTIC INDIA

als could perform on their own. By sitting alone under a tree and chanting the name of Rama, singing bhajana or meditating on God, the common Hindu could find the spiritual strength to endure hardship and **persecution**.

The great philosophers Madhva (1017-1137) and Ramanuja (1238-1317) were forerunners of popular saints during our period who strengthened Hindus and discouraged conversion. An early Vaishnava saint, Jayadeva (c. 1200), wrote the famous *Gita Govinda*, popular in Orissa and Bengal. Among the Vaishnava saints from Maharashtra were Jnaneshvara (1275-1296), Namdeva (1270-1350), Eknatha (1548-1600), Tukarama (1598-1649) and Samarth Ramdas (1606-1682).

In North India, Swami Ramananda (ca 1400-1470) promoted the worship of Lord Rama, praising him as "Hari," a name of Vishnu. Ramananda discouraged caste, saying, "Let no one ask about another's caste or with whom he eats; he who worships Hari is Hari's own."

Two traditions arose from Ramananda's popular teachings. One group, including Nimbarka (13th century), Chaitanya (1486-1534), Surdas (1483-1563), Mirabai (1503-1573) and Tulsidas (1532-1623), emphasized worship

of the personal God. They were enlightened persons filled with a sense of divine **ecstasy**. Vaishnavas especially revere Chaitanya and Mirabai as divine beings.

A second tradition began with Ramananda's disciple Kabir (1398-1518). He was adopted as a child and raised by a low-caste Muslim, a weaver. He wrote hundreds of spiritual poems in Hindi, the language of the people (rather than Sanskrit). His poems are easy to understand, even today, and millions still follow his teachings. Kabir's philosophy, mostly drawn from Hinduism, was simple and direct. It appealed both to Hindus and Muslims. He rejected the caste system and ridiculed many Hindu and Muslim religious practices. Seeking to promote religious harmony, Kabir taught that there is only one God for all religions.

The Sikh religion was also a powerful force. Its founder, Guru Nanak (1469-1539), taught, "Realization of Truth is higher than all else. Higher still is truthful living." He emphasized the continuous recitation of God's name and declared that meditation is the means to see God, who

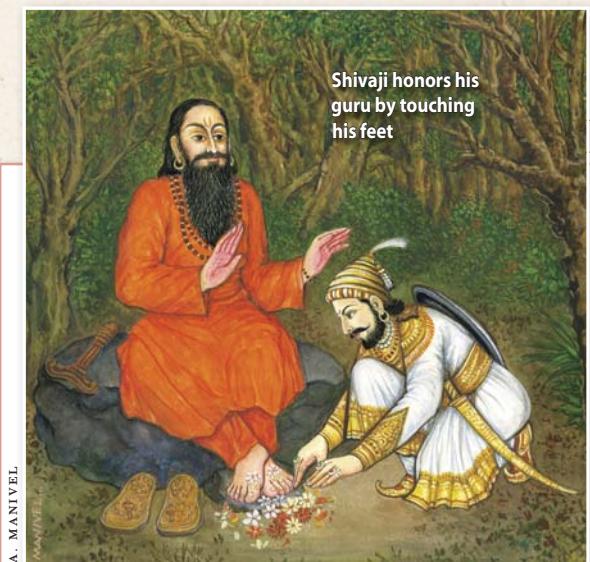
THE IMPACT TODAY

Tolerance for religious differences has greatly increased around the world in modern times, in part because of the growing influence of Hindu ideals.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

persecution
to be treated with hostility because of one's beliefs

ecstasy
feeling or expressing overwhelming joy in God



Shivaji honors his guru by touching his feet

BIOGRAPHY

ghal Emperor Aurangzeb, who sent a series of large armies to attack him. But Shivaji's smaller, fast-moving and well-armed forces proved difficult to overcome. Unlike earlier Hindu kings, Shivaji made use of modern means of warfare and even developed a navy. In 1674, he founded the Maratha Empire. Seventy years after his death in 1680, the Maratha armies pushed Mughal forces out of much of central India, leaving the Mughal Empire permanently weakened.

Shivaji's guru, Samartha Ramdasa, gave him spiritual advice and helped inspire the Maratha people toward freedom. Ramdasa had 1,100 disciples, each an excellent preacher, including 300 women. Ramdasa taught devotion to Lord Rama, especially through chanting the mantra "Shree Ram, Jaya Ram, Jaya Jaya Ram"—"Victory to Lord Rama." By one account, Shivaji offered Ramdasa his entire kingdom, which Ramdasa returned to him to rule in the name of Lord Rama.

German scholar Max Weber wrote in the 19th century, "Shivaji was no bigot and allowed equal freedom to all faiths. He was served as zealously by the Muslims as by the Hindus. He built a mosque opposite his palace for the use of his Muslim subjects." While Shivaji was not above sacking an enemy's city if he needed the money, he did not kill noncombatants, take slaves or damage Muslim holy sites.

SAINT AND KING

At the time of Shivaji's birth in 1627, the Marathas had been under Muslim domination for hundreds of years. At age 17 this courageous Maratha warrior led his first military campaign, capturing the Torna Fort from the Bijapur Sultanate in 1645. Within ten years, he gained control of enough territory to alarm Mu-

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
omnipresent existing everywhere at once, said of God

flourish to grow well and thrive
polytheist one who believes in or worships more than one God

Nine Sikh gurus followed Nanak. The eighth, Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), was executed by Aurangzeb for defending religious freedom. His son and successor, Gobind Singh, transformed the Sikhs into a warrior community called the Khalsa. Gobind Singh decreed that he was the last Sikh guru and after his death the *Guru Granth Sahib*, their holy scripture, would be the guide. From that time forward, the Sikhs have been an influential political and military force in North India.

As you have studied, South India largely escaped the oppressive Muslim domination of North and Central India. To this day the South retains the most ancient Hindu culture and has many grand temples. Influential saints of the time include Meykandar, Arunagirinathar, Tayumanavar, Vallabhacharya and Kumaraguruparar.

Other religious movements also

flourished during this period such as Kashmir Saivism, Natha saints and the Gorakha Panthi yogis. They all were part of India's ongoing vibrant religious spirit.

The Conqueror's Religious Goals

The Arab and Turkic Muslim invaders who swept across the Middle East, Africa, Central and South Asia were intent on religious domination, demanding conversion from those they conquered. They made an exception for "People of the Book," Christians and Jews, because certain parts of the *Torah* and the *Bible* are regarded as revealed scripture by the Muslims as well. They did not force Christians and Jews to convert, but humiliated them and imposed the *jizya* tax.

The Muslims treated Hindus as *kafirs*, lowly non-believers. The Christians judged Hindus to be **polytheists**, and some, as in Goa, used violence to convert them. Muslims and Christians both consider monotheism (the belief that there is only one God) to be the right conviction. As explained in

Chapter One, Hindus see no contradiction in believing in One Supreme God while also worshiping the Gods and Goddesses. But this is unacceptable to Muslims and Christians, and resulted in dreadful persecution and killing during this period.

Centuries of Conversion Attempts

Before the Arabs, all foreign invaders, including the Greeks and Huns, were eventually absorbed into mainstream Hindu society. This was also true of many tribal communities within India. The Muslim rulers—with the exceptions of Akbar and some others—made great effort to convert their Hindu subjects. They used persuasion, heavy taxes, legal discrimination and force, but had only limited success.

Christian conversion efforts in India, though sustained and sometimes vigorous, were not very successful. The East India Company found missionary efforts bad for business and did not encourage them.

At their worst, invaders and later rulers destroyed Hindu temples and killed those who would not convert. According to the Muslim accounts of the time, thousands of temples were looted and torn down, including hundreds at major **pilgrimage** destinations, such as Somnath, Mathura, Vrindavan and Varanasi. Many mosques were built on the same sites from the temple materials.

Among the Muslims, the Sufi preachers were most responsible for making converts. Sufism is a **mystical** tradition within Islam, with some elements similar to the Bhakti Movement. Sufism was much stronger during this period than it is today. Sufis worked closely with Muslim rulers and helped secure their rule by converting conquered people to Islam. Many persons captured and enslaved during raids on Hindu towns and villages converted to Islam knowing they would be treated better or even released.

The caste system was a main obstacle

to conversion. It guaranteed to Hindus a secure identity and place in their community, which they would lose by converting. Also, other religions did not appeal to them either philosophically or culturally. Some low-caste Hindus were tempted to convert to improve their social status. But, in fact, converts to both Christianity and Islam retained their caste position.

Even today, Indian Muslims who claim foreign ancestry—the descendants of Arabs, Turks, Afghans, etc.—are called Ashrafs and have a higher status than Hindu converts, who are called Ajlafs. The Ajlafs are divided into occupational castes, just as are Hindus. Likewise, Christian converts retained their caste status. The lowest, such as Untouchables, or Dalits, even have separate churches and graveyards.

The Common Man's Plight

Altogether, the common Hindu did not fare well during this time. He faced military attacks, discrimination as a *kafir*, oppressive taxes and sustained pressure to convert. Hindu rulers collected from farmers a tax of one-sixth of their crop. Under Muslim and British rule, taxes soared to as much as one-half, plunging the people of the once wealthy country of India into poverty.

Section 2 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

- Explain:** What evidence do we have that Hinduism in 1030 was similar to today's Hinduism?
- Analyze:** What are some reasons for Kabir's continued popularity in India?
- Explain:** How did Shivaji's faith and religious tolerance help him lead the Maratha people against the Mughals?
- Analyze:** Why do Hindus see no contradiction between worshiping the Supreme God and revering many Gods?

Focus on Writing

- Even when threatened, many Hindus refused to convert to another religion. Why did they choose to resist?

THE IMPACT TODAY

Religious tension still surrounds some sites where mosques were built over destroyed temples, such as in Varanasi, where the Gyanvapi Mosque was built atop the demolished Kashi Vishwanath Temple in the 11th century.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

mystical concerned with the soul or spirit, rather than material things

pilgrimage to travel to a special religious place

Hindu Games

Snakes and Ladders

the Western childrens game Snakes and Ladders, comes from the Indian game for adults called Gyan Chaupar, the "Game of Knowledge." Gyan Chaupar teaches the Hindu spiritual path to moksha, which is liberation from reincarnation. There are 72 numbered squares on the board listing various virtues, vices, states of consciousness and planes of existence. The ladders start from squares with virtues, such as devotion, and move the player up the board. Snakes are found on squares of vices, such as jealousy, and take the player back down the board.

Play begins at square one in the lower left corner. In the old days, the player threw six cowrie shells on the floor. The number of shells that landed upright indicated the number of squares to

The object of the game is to land exactly on square 68, the center of the top row. This square represents liberation from rebirth and entry into heaven. If he lands past 68, he continues to play until he reaches 72, which takes him back to 51 for another try. The game is an entertaining way to learn about making progress on the spiritual path. By cultivating a virtue, such as devotion, one advances. By falling prey to egotism, one goes backwards.

Play the game online or download the board and full instructions at www.hinduismtoday.com/resources/snakesandladders.

10 HINDUISM TO

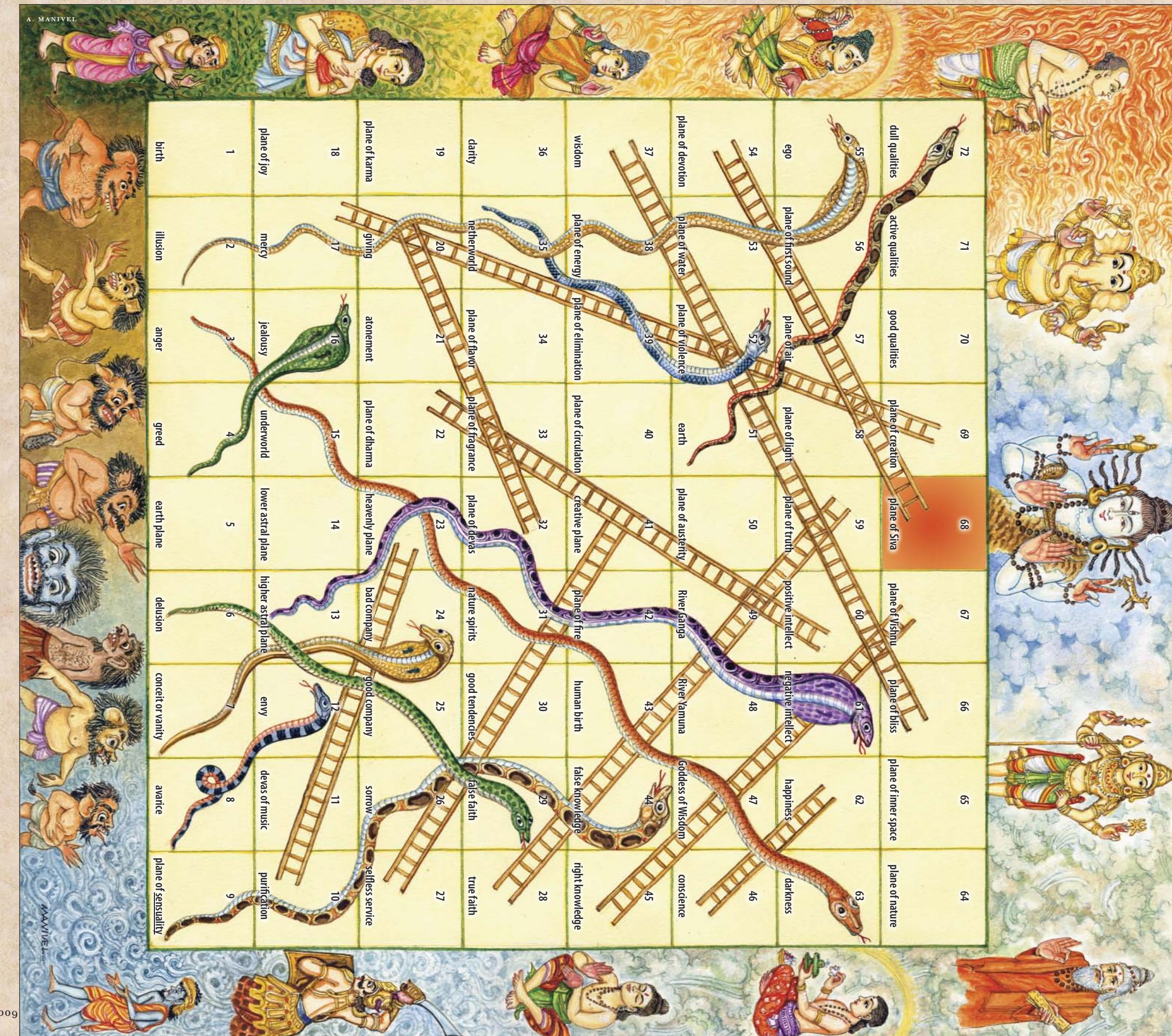
move forward. Nowadays dice are used. If the player lands on a ladder, he jumps to the square at the top of the ladder. If he lands on the head of a snake, he slides back down the snake to a low square. The object of the game is to land exactly on square 68, the center of the top row. This square represents liberation from rebirth and entry into heaven. If he lands past 68, he continues to play until he reaches 72, which takes him back to 51 for another try. The game is

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The Western children's game Snakes and Ladders, or Chutes and Ladders, comes from the Indian game for adults called Gyan Chaupar, the "Game of Knowledge." Gyan Chaupar teaches the Hindu spiritual path to moksha, which is liberation from reincarnation. There are 72 numbered squares on the board listing various virtues, vices, states of consciousness and planes of existence. The ladders start from squares with virtues, such as devotion, and move the player up the board. Snakes are found on squares of vices, such as jealousy, and take the player back down the board.

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Music, Art, Dance and Architecture

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. India has rich artistic traditions of music, dance, drama, painting and architecture.
2. These arts are closely tied to the Hindu religion.
3. Muslim rule brought Persian influence to Indian painting and architecture.

The Big Idea

Islamic culture influenced some forms of Indian art, while others remained largely unaffected.

Key Terms

bhajana, p. 12
katha, p. 13
raga, p. 13
tala, p. 13
mudras, p. 15

HINDUISM TODAY'S TEACHING STANDARDS

8. Describe the relationship between Hinduism and traditional forms of Indian art, including music, dance, drama, painting and architecture.
9. Explain how the Muslim conquests in the subcontinent influenced the painting and architectural styles of northern and central India.

If YOU lived then...

Your father is an artist hired by Mughal Emperor Akbar in Delhi. The emperor has brought great painters from Persia. He wants to develop a new art style. You have been an apprentice to your father for several years now, but now you both must learn a new artistic style. Your father thinks it will be valuable to learn from the Persians.

How do you feel about learning the new art form?

BUILDING BACKGROUND: The arts, such as painting, music, dance and architecture, are essential parts of every culture. Flourishing civilizations develop new artistic styles over time. Fresh ideas appear and blend with old traditions, allowing artists to express the culture, thoughts and emotions of the time in beautiful, uplifting works.

Artistic Achievements

Art within Hindu India was already highly developed prior to the Arab, Turkic and Mughal invasions. Some art forms, such as music and dance, were less affected by these invasions, especially in the South where Hindu rule was the norm. In the North, Persian building design, with its arches and domes, became common, and in painting, the Mughal emperors stimulated a harmonious blending of composition and method, thus creating the Indo-Islamic art style.

A Rich History of Music

India has always had an extraordinarily diverse musical scene. This ranges from the complex works of the classical tradition to the villagers' simple work songs and devotional hymns in local languages. Temple stone workers, for example, sing together to coordinate the effort of moving a heavy stone. At a certain point in the song, all apply perfectly timed force to their iron pry bars. In this way, stones weighing tons can be moved by hand. To this day, Hindu men and women sing devotional songs to accompany and ease their daily tasks.

There is within Hinduism a long tradition of *bhajana* and *kirtana*, call-and-response devotional singing of simple songs, usually in small groups with musical accompaniment. *Katha* is a popular form of storytelling, occurring in multiple sessions, often spanning many

days. A highly skilled storyteller will recount episodes from sacred texts, such as the *Ramayana*, then lead the audience in singing related *bhajanas*.

Alongside these basic musical traditions is India's classical Carnatic music. Three great innovators of this ancient system lived in South India in the late 18th and early 19th centuries: Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. They **systematized** and improved upon the existing framework of raga and tala, the essentials of Indian music. Hindustani is a related musical system that arose in the North as musicians blended Persian elements into the Indian tradition.

First, the composer selects a raga in which to write his song. A raga is a pattern of notes upon which a melody is made. Ragas include notes from the seven-note Indian scale (*sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni*) as well as micro-tones, which are like the sharps and flats of Western music, only more numerous. This multiplicity of tones allows for the creation of thousands of ragas. Next, the composer selects a tala, or rhythmic pattern. Talas

range from the simple and most common eight-beat Adi tala to elaborate rhythms such as the Dhamar tala, composed of 14 beats divided as 5, 2, 3 and 4.

Songs were written in Sanskrit and increasingly in the regional languages, such as Hindi, Telugu and Tamil. Singers and musicians **improvise** upon the basic melody while keeping within the chosen raga and tala. The results are always creative, akin to the improvisations in Western jazz. This is one key way that Indian classical music differs from Western classical music, which is usually played exactly as it was composed.

A Meeting of Art Styles

The Mughal emperors were responsible for a major advancement in painting which eventually influenced much of India. Earlier Muslim rulers started the process by bringing artists to India to illustrate the elaborate handwritten books of the time (see top left on page 14). These painters had been influenced earlier by Chinese artists who were brought to Persia by conquering Mongols.

THE IMPACT TODAY

Modern *katha* performers attract crowds of thousands in the US and England, and hundreds of thousands in India.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

systematize
to arrange in an orderly fashion

improvise
in music, to create and perform spontaneously

INDIA'S MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

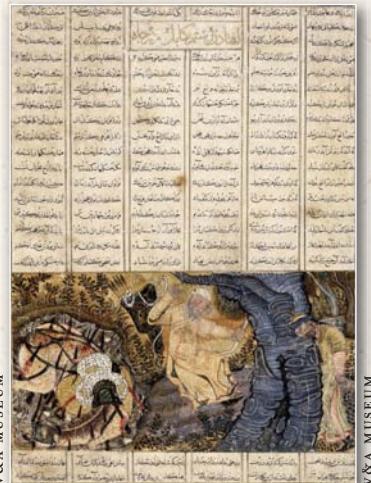
Cymbals, drums, horns and stringed instruments commonly accompany the singer in the various types of Indian music. In concerts, the singer and the drum or horn player will engage in a kind of duet, with each improvising upon the other's melody line and rhythm.



Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. At left is the Sarasvati Vina, with 24 frets, four playing strings and three drone strings. The other two instruments are the four-stringed tambura. In the background are the Divinities of music.



The *shehnai*, a popular, oboe-like, North Indian reed instrument, is similar to the larger *nadaswara* of South India



Top left: a page from a 1330 ce Persian manuscript in the style Akbar encouraged. Top right: a watercolor painting of a scene from the Ramayana from Bengal is typical of the two-dimensional, flat style of most earlier Indian art. Above: this portrait of Rajput Raja Aniruddha Singh, painted in Rajasthan in the early 1700s, is typical of the Mughal school which evolved from the blending of earlier styles.

The Mughal Emperor Akbar, trained in art as a child, encouraged a true synthesis of forms. He commissioned craftsmen by the hundreds in an almost factory-like setting under his Royal Bureau of Books. This enterprise, headed by the great Persian artists, Khwaja Abdus Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali, resulted in major artistic innovations.

As the Mughal Empire declined, this huge community of artists lost their rich patronage. The last emperor, Aurangzeb, dismissed the artists and banned music and dance. He judged their work contrary to Islamic teachings that prohibit the depiction of religious themes in any art form. Hindu and Muslim artists turned to independent local rulers across India for support. Many applied the new techniques to Hindu subjects, especially illustrating the *Mahabharata* and stories of Lord Krishna.

Indian painting before this time was two-dimensional, as seen in the example at top left. The new style adopted typical Indian colors, used delicate brush lines (some made with a brush of a single squirrel hair) and introduced better lighting effects. Advancements were also made in the preparation of pigments and paints, allowing for a greater range and depth of color.

During the British rule, a blending of painting styles was attempted between Indo-Islamic and European art. The result, called Company style, tended toward realism, and was later displaced by the invention of photography.

Architecture

In South India during this period, the art of temple building reached its peak. In fact, Hindu temples today are still built according to the styles developed at this time, following principles from the ancient *Agama* texts. In North India, Hindu architecture was eventually strongly influenced by Persian design, especially the use of the dome and arch. The most spectacular construction during the period was the Taj Mahal, among the world's most elegant buildings. Built in white marble by Shah Jahan to entomb his beloved wife, the Taj, with its immense domes and towering minarets, is Persian

RELIGION THROUGH MOVEMENT

Bharatanatyam and the related dances Kuchipudi and Odissi come from the ancient temple dances of South India, described in the 2,000-year-old *Natyashastra*. Originally, dance, accompanied by classical Indian music, was one of the sixteen offerings made during the ritual worship called puja. Indian dance is not simply entertainment, but a religious experience both for the dancer and the audience. Early dance tradition used improvisation, as does Indian music, but today the choreography is usually set. Most dances are depictions of religious stories, told through poses, movements and dozens of meaningful hand gestures called mudras.

When the first Bharatanatyam dancers came to Europe in 1838, a reviewer wrote, "The dancers of all Europe dance with their feet, but that is all. The Indians dance in a different manner. They dance with their whole frame. Their heads dance, their arms dance. Their eyes, above all, obey the movement and fury of the dance. Their feet click against the floor; the arms and the hands flash in the air; the eyes sparkle; their mouths mutter; the whole body quivers."



COURTESY KANISHKA PATEL

A Bharatanayam dancer in the pose of Siva Nataraja; (left) hand gestures, called mudras: picking flowers, greeting, lotus

in design with many Hindu elements. Completed in 1653, it took 20,000 craftsmen working 22 years to build and was a great drain on the treasury. Shah Jahan was overthrown and imprisoned by his son, Aurangzeb, shortly after its completion.

not break down under the alien rule, so the social structure remained stable. Most Hindus did not convert to Islam, despite heavy pressure. The arrival of the East India Company changed the political situation. By force and skillful tactics, the British slowly gained complete control of India.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

Nataraja

"King of Dance," a form of Lord Siva

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Beginning in 1100, Muslim armies conquered vast regions of India. Despite repeated defeats, the Rajput and other Hindu rulers refused to surrender. South India, far from the Muslim capitals of Delhi and Agra, escaped the unceasing warfare and foreign dominance that beset North India, suffering only periodic raids. Wherever Hindus were conquered, resistance continued, mainly on a social and religious level. The caste system did

Section 3 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

- Describe:** What are the roles of raga, tala and improvisation in Indian classical music?
- Analyze:** What were some of the advancements made in painting under the Mughals? What made these advancements possible?
- Contrast:** How did the architecture of this period differ in North and South India and why?

Focus on Writing

- Synthesize:** How does the mixing of cultures result in new artistic styles? Give examples from your society.

DIRECTIONS: READ EACH QUESTION AND CIRCLE THE LETTER OF THE BEST RESPONSE

1. We need to understand even unpleasant history because:
 - We can then punish the people responsible
 - It helps us learn to live in peace today
 - It helps us see that some religions are bad
 - We should never forgive our attackers
2. What military advantage did Muslim invaders have?
 - Support from people in the invaded regions
 - Many more soldiers than the Indian kings
 - Bigger elephants and more of them
 - Horses, better weapons, tactics and training
3. Why is the rule of Mughal Emperor Akbar remembered as exceptional?
 - He destroyed many Hindu temples
 - He created the largest empire in the world
 - He was tolerant of other religions
 - He formed strong alliances with British merchants
4. How did the British East India Company gain control of India?
 - They set up puppet rulers under their control
 - They created their own army
 - They played one ruler against another
 - All of the above
5. How did the Bhakti Movement help preserve Hinduism?
 - It strongly supported the caste system
 - Followers were exempt from the religious tax (jizya)
 - Its devotional practices made each Hindu strong
 - It organized military resistance to the Muslims
6. Converts to Islam and Christianity found themselves
 - Welcomed as equals
 - At the same social level as before their conversion
 - Still subject to the religious tax
 - All of the above
7. When Shivaji offered his guru the kingdom, the guru
 - Took over the kingdom and moved into the palace
 - Told Shivaji to rule it in the name of Lord Rama
 - Refused to accept it
 - Divided the kingdom among his followers
8. Which of the following was NOT a hardship endured by Hindus during this period?
 - The heavy religious tax
 - The destruction of temples
 - The powerful Bhakti Movement
 - Being regarded as kafirs
9. Why did the British East India Company not encourage missionary efforts to convert Hindus?
 - They found these efforts to be bad for business
 - They considered Hindus to be 'People of the Book'
 - They found the missionaries' methods unethical
 - They thought Hinduism was a better religion
10. The game of Gyan Chaupar was intended to:
 - Teach the path to spiritual liberation
 - Be entertaining for children
 - Convert Hindus to Christianity
 - Show that going to heaven is not the goal of life
11. When did Hindus make and enjoy music?
 - In formal concerts with musicians
 - During their work day
 - At the special events called kathas
 - All of the above
12. What terms best describe Indian music?
 - Improvisation
 - Raga
 - Tala
 - All of the above
13. Which Indian art forms changed during Muslim times?
 - Music and dance
 - Painting and architecture
 - Music and painting
 - All of the above
14. Why did India remain mostly Hindu?
 - The caste system
 - Loyalty to the Hindu religion
 - The personal nature of Bhakti worship
 - All of the above

Internet Resources: Go to <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/education/> for a PDF version of this chapter, as well as Chapters One and Two with clickable links to resources. Also at the same URL are additional teaching

resources and letters of endorsement from academics and community leaders. To order additional copies of this Educational Insight, go to <http://www.minimela.com/booklets/>.



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EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Honoring the Spirit Of Community

A Personal Revelation
about Ways of Worship at
Village Shrines in India

Excerpts from Stephen
P. Huylers Classic Work:
*Meeting God, Elements
of Hindu Devotion*

PUBLISHED BY YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
WWW.YALEBOOKS.COM

Khonant, Kurda District, Orissa: Children throughout India participate in annual festivals honoring Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning. Here a group of Orissan children excitedly reach out to receive the blessings of the Goddess as Her image is being carried for installment in a roadside shrine.

STEPHEN P. HUYLER





Village Mysticism

Each Hindu community on the Indian subcontinent has its own *Gramadevata*, literally "village Divinity," the Deity regarded as synonymous with the locality and everything within it. Just as the home is viewed as a composite of the spirits of all of its inhabitants and of the materials that went into its construction, so also is the community a blend of its physical, spiritual and emotional components. Every house, every street, all of the shops, the craft studios, the barns, the farms, the trees and bushes, the wells, the reservoirs and streams, the inhabitants (people, animals and insects), the spirits of those who have lived and died there, and even the activities, thoughts and emotions of everyone living there—all are part of one great spirit identified as a Deity, a *Gramadevata*. This Deity is the community, just as the community is the Deity. They are inseparable.

Towns and cities have many individual subsections, each of which usually has its own *Gramadevata*. For example, every small locality in the Rajasthan city of Jodhpur has a God or Goddess that has been worshiped in that spot for as long as the community has existed. While most cities are internally divided into numerous smaller entities, a municipality may also be viewed as one great Deity, interwoven with all the inclusive *Gramadevatas*.

In this way, the entire southern Indian city of Madurai is believed to be the Goddess Meenakshi, the *Gramadevata* of the initial community that lived there. Her power is believed to be so immense that several kingdoms during the past millennia have owed their greatness to Her beneficence. Many thousands of pilgrims from all over India visit Her temple for Her darshan every year.



Honoring the Goddess

Although the light is less intense than earlier, the air is still hot and dusty. After spending the entire day at the back-breaking toil of picking cotton, Lalubhai and his wife, Meeraben, have just come home. They tiredly greet their four small children, the youngest still in the arms of his toothless grandmother. As they sip cups of milky tea and munch thick, sugary biscuits, they listen to the stories of the children's adventures while their parents were at work. Then it is time to get ready to go to the shrine.

Meeraben retires to the walled washroom to clean off the day's dust and to change into her brightest red sari, tie-dyed in yellow and green. She puts on her best jewelry: large silver anklets and bracelets, several rings, long earrings studded with semi-precious stones and a thick silver necklace. Lalubhai bathes right there in the courtyard, stripped down to his underwear, splashing water over himself and lathering profusely before rinsing clean. He wraps a lungi (sarong) around his waist and legs in order to discreetly change into clean pajamas surmounted by a fresh khadi kurta (handspun cotton tunic).



He then takes a five-yard length of fine cotton cloth, dyed in a rainbow of bold colors, and wraps it around and around his head to create an elegant turban. His only jewelry are two gold and zircon studs in his ears, a silver amulet around his neck and his watch. Lalubhai's mother had washed and dressed the children before their parents reached home. Then, with the children's eight cousins, two uncles, three aunts and grandmother, the family is ready to leave the house. All are dressed in their finery, and the mood is one of gaiety and anticipation.

As they walk down the street through the village of similar tiled-roof mud houses, they are joined by members of other families. It is Friday, the most auspicious day on which to worship Mataji, the Deity that is the community. Her pujas may take place at any time during the day, and some families were

at Her shrine as early as sunrise. Lalubhai's family prefer to approach Her in the evening, when their duties are done and they can devote their entire minds to Her service. On the outskirts of the village, in the fields beyond the last house, is an ancient pipal tree. Its main trunk is over nine feet in diameter, and its lateral roots have grown into smaller trunks; the entire tree has a radius of a medium-sized house. Between the gnarly roots of the central trunk is a huge standing stone covered with orange-red vermillion. These, the tree and the stone, are Mataji, the Goddess who protects the village and provides for its welfare. No one knows how long She has been worshiped in this spot—quite possibly for a thousand years or more, probably since the first people settled the village.

No brahmanas live in this community, only farmers like

Lalubhai and his family, craftsmen, a few merchants and some harijans (those in such occupations as cleaning sewers and disposing of the dead). The village is poor and has no money to hire a full-time priest. Instead, various families volunteer to take care of the shrine, sweeping around the tree every morning and placing fresh flowers on the rocks at its base. One of the village elders serves as the pujari (one who facilitates the pujas) each Friday and at the annual festival of the Goddess. Lalubhai, as the family's oldest male, carries a flat basket filled with freshly made sticky sweets, a small mound of white sugar lumps, some flowers just picked from alongside the village reservoir, a few cubes of camphor, and sticks of incense. Meeraben holds a deeper basket of fluffy cotton straight from their field. In its center is a simply sculpted clay horse, a gift to the



Most *Gramadevatas* are feminine—associated with the Earth, fertility, healing and protection. Their names often reflect their association with the Mother Goddess: they are usually prefixed or suffixed with Ma, Mata, Matrika or Amman (each a regional translation of "mother"), Ben or Bai (sister) or Rani (queen). Sometimes their regional identities have been merged with that of a greater pan-Indian Deity, such as Durga or Mari.

For example, the *Gramadevata* of many southern Indian communities is Mariamman, while seven temples to the Goddess Durga Ma surround and guard the royal city of Udaipur. According to Hindu numerology, seven is particularly auspicious. Seven Mothers (*Saptamatrika*) are believed to guard many towns throughout the subcontinent, each Mother a specific aspect of the great Divine who may be beseeched in times of particular need. Together They are inseparable from the community that They incorporate. Their images may be delicately carved to delineate the various attributes of the individual Goddesses, but most often They are represented simply by a row of seven sacred stones placed beneath an ancient tree.

Shrines

Although *Gramadevatas* are indivisible from Their communities, each must have a focal point, a specific place or object on which to direct attention. The *devasthana*, or shrine, of a *Gramadevata* is usu-

Nagpur, Puri District, Orissa: A farmer prostrates himself in prayer beneath a sacred pipal tree that his village worships as the Goddess-Spirit of their community.



Goddess in gratitude for this year's bountiful harvest.

Lalubhai hands all the offerings to the old pujari, who places the cotton in a growing pile to one side and the terracotta horse just to the right of the red stone. He puts some of the flowers on the horse and the rest among those that already surround the stone. He puts the incense and camphor into a large brass *arati* tray and the basket of sweets and sugar with others near the tree's roots.

Almost one hundred villagers have assembled as the sun begins to set. The pujari lights the incense and waves it in front of the stone and around the roots before pushing the sticks into a hole in the ground at their base. He then leads the group in prayers to the Goddess, beginning with songs praising Her name: "Om Mata, Mataji, Om Mata, Mataji." This is followed by a prayer: "You are the True One, the Auspicious, the Beautiful, the Purest Form of all the Gods. You are our Mother [Mataji]: you have given us our lives; you are with us now; you give us our future. You are the Protector: you keep us safe. You destroy evil and you bring us health. We sing your names, we sing your praises. You are our Mother [Mataji]. We are your children."

As they sing, Lalubhai and Meeraben concentrate on the magnificence of the Goddess, on the prosperity that they have received through Her bounty: healthy children, a good, strong family, a large new harvest of cotton and with it the promise



of enough to live on throughout the coming year. They focus their thoughts on their gratitude for their community and for the balance in their lives within it. In their prayers they experience a sense of oneness, a direct link to the Goddess and to the world around them: they have darshan with Mataji.

The day is darkening, and the old pujari lights several clay lamps filled with oil. He uses one of these lamps to ignite the camphor mounded on the *arati* tray, which he then holds up in front of the tree while several others strike the clappers of the bells that hang from the tree's branches. The noise is almost deafening as all the devotees again sing out: "Om Mata, Mataji,

Om Mata, Mataji..."

Meeraben, Lalubhai, his mother, his brothers and their wives usher their children up to the *arati* and all hold their hands above the cool flame before raising their fingers to their closed eyelids. The puja is complete. The newly blessed sweets are returned to the family members, who begin to eat them immediately. The cotton will be given to a local weaver to make into cloth to dress the roots of the sacred tree. The horse remains where it was placed, its spirit believed to be magically transformed into a real horse for the Goddess's use in the heavens. Gradually it will crumble and be replaced by others given to

the Goddess in return for answered prayers.

Lalubhai and his family join their neighbors on their walk back along the shadow-enfolded road to the village. Someone begins to hum a popular film tune, and others join in. Soon the whole group is singing the familiar words, their feelings in harmony through having participated together in the weekly ritual for Mataji. In honoring the village Goddess they have also honored their community, their occupations and themselves. They feel refreshed and complete, ready to go home for dinner and bed, but also ready to begin the next week of demanding activities.



ally associated with an important natural feature: a hill, a boulder, a stream or pond, a tree or grove of trees. Trees are by far the most common: there are hundreds of thousands of sacred trees being worshiped constantly in India. Most are ancient, venerated as *Gramadevatas* for untold centuries in the same way that the pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*, a kind of banyan) is worshiped by Lalubhai and his family in the story on page 56.

The appearance of these tree sanctuaries is as varied as the communities themselves: sometimes there are several trees together, or a single tree with a large platform built around it, or one marked with flags and banners, or one with its trunk dressed like the Goddess Herself. The *devasthana* may be in the center of the village or in the fields beyond the farthest house. When the tree dies, the spot remains sacred. It is believed to be vibrant with the energies of innumerable pujas and will usually continue to be a focus of community worship, most often with a platform or building constructed where the tree stood.

The shrines in brahmana villages or those with brahmana occupants are usually overseen by brahmana priests. Pujas that take place in *devasthanas* in those many communities without brahmana occupants are often facilitated by non-brahmana priests, often because the community simply may not be able to afford to hire a brahmana. Conversely, a single brahmana in a village might feel isolated and therefore not want to move there.

The position of priest may be hereditary, usually given to a person of a menial caste whose family has conducted the pujas at a *devasthana* for untold generations. In some villages, however, inhabitants share responsibility for the shrine and appoint respected citizens to conduct worship, like the

Thiruparankundram, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu:

Praying for fertility and successful childbirth, a young couple prostrate themselves on the platform of a community shrine in the center of a southern village.

How India Enriched My Life

FROM THE PREFACE OF *MEETING GOD*: AUTHOR STEPHEN HUYLER EXPLAINS HOW HE FELL IN LOVE WITH INDIA, HER PEOPLE AND THEIR HINDU FAITH

I had been to Padmapoda, a village in eastern India, a number of times previously to visit the family of a close friend. Each time, I had been taken to see the sacred tree that embodies the local Goddess, Gelubai, the Deity of the community. This new experience was an unprecedented honor: being allowed to witness the ceremony of invocation in which the dynamic power of the supreme Goddess Chandi was requested to subsume and transform that of the local Deity. It was a very special ritual, enacted on rare occasions to implore the aid of the Goddess in overcoming a difficult domestic problem. My friend Babu Mohapatra, understanding my wish for insights into Hinduism as preparation for writing my book, *Meeting God*, had arranged this special puja.

The entire ritual had already taken two priests two hours: preparing and dressing the image of the Goddess, drawing a sacred diagram upon the ground and building a fire on it, and feeding that fire with clarified butter (ghee), all the while singing Her names and praises.





pujari in Mataji's shrine. Many rituals that take place in a *devasthana* are conducted by individual devotees without an intermediary. The contact is direct between devotee and Deity.

Gramadevatas

Occasionally the spirit of community, the *Gramadevata*, may be transformed into that of another, greater Deity. For example, the essence of the tiny Orissan village of Padmapoda is viewed as the Goddess Gelubai, a local *Thakurani*, or benign form of the Divine Feminine honored within a sacred tree. Gelubai is believed to protect and nurture every aspect of existence within Padmapoda's boundaries. At times of great need, however, when an individual, a family, or the entire village requires the aid of Shakti (the dynamic power of the Great Goddess), then a special puja is enacted in which the identity of Gelubai is subsumed into that of the Goddess Chandi. Perhaps someone is particularly ill and is unable to be cured by doctors, or perhaps the village is suffering a drought that endangers its crops and livelihood. In these and other dire cases a special brahmana priest will be hired to perform the puja.

Gelubai is first bathed, dressed and adorned, as She is every day, and Her usual puja is conducted. Next, an area is cleaned on the platform in front of the tree; a sacred diagram is drawn with special powders, and a fire is laid with sticks of wood. Then the flames are made to flare by being anointed with ghee, during which time the priest sings the names and attributes of the Goddess Chandi. As he extols Her, he places a coconut in the flames and invites the Goddess to pour Her divine energy into the tree, thereby transforming its essence from that of the village into the universal power of the Absolute.

As the coconut heats, the milk within it boils, causing it to burst, which signals the moment when the transformation is complete. Chandi in all Her strength is then present within the village. Her dev-

otees may have direct darshan with Her. They believe that whatever they pray for will happen, and that by this ritual miracles do occur. The sick person will be healed or the drought ended. Once the puja is complete and the invocations made, Chandi is reverentially thanked and invited to leave the site. The tree returns once more to Gelubai as the village returns to its peaceful farming existence.

Although the majority of Indian communities worship feminine *Gramadevatas*, many communities envision these Deities as masculine. In some regions it is common to worship a local form of Rama or Hanuman as *Gramadevata*. In these cases indigenous legends usually involve the Deity's interaction with local sites and historical characters that are unique variations of the more common mythology. Many villages refer simply to their God as Baba or Appan (two words for father) or an appellation that incorporates one of these names. Just as Mataji is considered the mother of Lalubhai's village, in other communities Deities are visualized as judicious and powerful fathers who protect their families from danger.

In the eastern part of the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, many towns and villages have two *Gramadevatas*—one masculine, the other feminine—each housed in Its own tree shrine. The local names of these Gods and Goddesses are as varied as their communities, although the generic name for the God is either Baba or Di-Baba, while the Goddess is called Kali-Ma. Both are considered tutelary Deities: they protect their devotees from adversity. Villagers

Cumbum, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu: Offerings tied in bits of cloth have been fastened to the lateral roots of this pipal tree as a part of prayers to the Goddess Durga. To the upper left is a string of small rolls of paper, each containing the names of the Goddess written in longhand 1,008 times as a gesture of honor.

As a middle-aged cultural anthropologist and art historian who had already spent more than half my life studying India, I prided myself on objectivity. I might feel empathy toward a particular subject or situation, but as a scholar I tried to distance myself to observe and take note.

Despite my resistance at that moment, as the fire flared brightly and the spirit of the Goddess was invoked to enter the tree and be available to the village, I actually felt Her presence. I felt a change in the atmosphere: a palpable sense of power vibrating throughout the area surrounding the sacred tree. It was a type of pulsating energy, the strength of which I had never before sensed in my life. I was completely surprised, overwhelmed beyond any expectation. In that one moment I, who had come as an observer, had become a participant. That insight altered and enriched my perception, allowing me to release decades of self-identity as an objective outsider. By being fully present and receptive to an experience so different from anything that I had been raised to understand, my personal and professional life was changed. I was transformed.

My life has been filled with abundance. I arrived in India on my twentieth birthday to spend the next seven months living in homes throughout the Indian subcontinent. It was a seminal

experience that provided the basis for my next twenty-eight years of field research.

I have always found the Indian people to be remarkably hospitable, opening their hearts and their lives to me with generous candor. By profession I have conducted a cross-cultural survey of the material culture of rural India for years, criss-crossing the country in pursuit of the comprehension and documentation of Indian folk arts and crafts. People have always invited me into their homes, to witness and share in their private lives and feelings. From the beginning I have been in awe of the innumerable household rituals I have been privileged to observe. I have been fascinated by Hindu spirituality, by the ways in which conscious awareness of the Divine permeates every aspect of daily and seasonal life. But for a young American raised in a strong Christian family, much of it seemed obtuse and confusing.

My research and photography of Indian creativity enabled me to focus on the material world, to learn to understand Indian culture through the objects it produced. But as all crafts in India are believed to have a spiritual content and purpose, my awareness and understanding of Hinduism grew as my work evolved. Two of my previous books have dealt with sacred arts.





Padmapoda, Puri District, Orissa: Several centuries of daily applications of black oil and red vermillion to one spot on this sacred tree in a small village in eastern India has resulted in a raised lacquer mound that is treated as the face of the Goddess Gelubai. Bangles have been tied as offerings to the Goddess during prayers by women for the health of their families.

may pray to either or both, depending on inclination and need. An outsider would have difficulty ascertaining the difference between the two tree shrines that honor the God and Goddess, except when terracotta offerings have been made. When devotees request the aid of Di-Baba, it is customary to promise to give Him a terracotta horse when their prayers are answered. If a boon is received, the worshiper will commission this sculpture to be made by a local potter. On a day considered auspicious to the God, the horse will be placed in His *devasthana*, along with gifts of flowers and food.

Pujas to Kali-Ma are more popular than those to Di-Baba. Kali-Ma is viewed locally as the Mother Goddess and is petitioned for aid when any kind of problem strikes the family. Her followers may come from any Hindu sect. Her pujas are considered particularly effective in combating agricultural calamities, family crises, civic disputes, infertility and disease. Many believe Her to be both the cause and the cure of smallpox, cholera and measles. When struck with one of these diseases, a person is said to be inhabited by Kali-Ma. Part of the cure is to worship and honor the Goddess within.

Often the worshiper will promise that if the Goddess answers his or her prayers, then terracotta elephants will be given to Her. These elephants are believed to become real animals in the spirit world the instant they are placed in Her shrine, and many believe that Kali-Ma rides them in Her nightly battles against evil. Once the elephants

have been given and transformed by the Goddess, they no longer have any value. They, like the horses given to Di-Baba, remain beneath the tree to disintegrate with the weather, their sole purpose fulfilled.

Terracotta gifts are placed in the shrines of *Gramadevatas* throughout India. Most often made on commission by local potters, they are easily affordable, even in a country where the overall per capita income is particularly low. Their form and the style of production vary according to local tradition. Many are simple stick figures made of dowels of clay, others are sculpted of elements thrown on the wheel, while still others are made by coil or slab techniques, or mass-produced in molds. They range in size from just inches high to over sixteen feet, the largest terracottas known in the history of mankind. Almost all are gifts to local *Gramadevatas* in grateful response to the Deities' beneficence. Each, even the most elaborate, is ephemeral: its value is in the giving. It represents a personal commitment between the devotee and his or her Deity, the essence of Hindu reciprocity.

Considering that each Hindu community honors its own individual *Gramadevata*, it is no wonder that India is said to contain a million and one Gods and Goddesses. The present census lists more than 630,000 villages, not counting the numerous towns and cities. In its entirety, the Hindu pantheon is overwhelming, inconceivable. Its relevance lies in its approachability, not its vastness. Each Hindu has a vital sense of belonging. Each has an *Ishtadevata*, the Deity of personal choice; a *Kuladevata*, the Deity of family and household; and a *Gramadevata*, the Deity of community. An individual's life is entwined in recognizing and honoring these relationships, in defining the self and one's interconnectedness to all other living beings. In a world where concepts and values are constantly challenged, the underlying purpose of all the numerous rituals and pujas of every day and season is to allow the Hindu to meet God, an experience that brings with it a sense of clarity, balance and belonging.

Meeting God, which I published in 1999, had its direct genesis in an exhibition I proposed and co-curated at the Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery entitled "Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion." Sacred Hindu objects, drawn largely from the private collection of Paul Walter, were displayed as they were originally meant to be seen: not primarily as works of art (although many are indeed beautiful pieces) but dressed, adorned and installed in shrines.

The exhibition, which opened in 1996 and ran until 2000, attempted to inform visitors of many of the previously misunderstood aspects of this major religion. The gathering of materials and writing of the text for the show (descriptive panels and labels) was the most difficult task I have ever undertaken. It required a simple and yet enticing synthesis of what is perhaps the most complicated and misunderstood group of religions in the world (collectively called Hinduism). The experience of working on that permanent exhibition inspired the traveling exhibition and this book.

I spent five years gathering material in India for these three purposes. During that period, my life was deeply enriched. From that first experience of participating in the worship of the Goddess Chandi in the sacred tree in Orissa, my

perceptiveness continued to grow immeasurably. Now when I am invited to attend a sacred ceremony, I no longer withhold myself in critical appraisal. I am fully present with all of my senses to absorb the ritual, to feel the full experience. I realize now that my earlier distance was merely the consequence of my own limitations.

The many Indians with whom I have interacted have always invited my full participation. For years I held myself apart. My Western heritage and my unconscious miscomprehension of image worship blinded me from deeper understanding. Today I believe that I can still retain a grounding in and deep respect for my American Christian background while being receptive to the many facets of Hindu spirituality. I can admire and even be in awe of the ways in which the sacred permeates the lives of the Hindu people while still maintaining strong attachments to my own home, family, friends, culture and ideals. Awareness of one only enriches awareness of the other.

Long before I knew what was happening, I was being offered a deep trust. By opening their homes and their hearts to me, in sharing their private personal and sacred thoughts with me, countless individuals in India have consciously and unconsciously made me an emissary. I understand now that I can



serve as a bridge between two cultures.

I have long felt the deep need to set aright the extraordinary imbalance of Western opinions of India. We often base our views of the subcontinent on sensationalized media reports that focus on India's inequalities, injustices and eccentricities, without attempting to portray her strengths. As in most societies, great inequities exist and must be improved, but it is inappropriate to believe that these problems define the country and her people. Many of the negative conditions in India are indeed deplorable (overpopulation, social and economic disparity, and environmental pollution, among others); but it is essential to also recognize India's vitality, her statistics of positive change, and her remarkable agricultural, economic and social improvements since Independence. Projections assert that India will be a leading world power within the first few decades of the twenty-first century.

It is time that we in the West begin to re-educate ourselves and reconsider our values. It is remarkable that as India modernizes, as her people grow into leading proponents of an innovative and contemporary world, their sense of religion and spirituality is not diminished. Hinduism, the world's third largest religion, accounting for one in every six human beings, is still as vital to the lives of the Indian people as it has ever been. It is a belief system in complete harmony with change, adaptation, modernization, and growth, and it affects every aspect of every day of most Hindu Indians.

For the average Hindu, the Divine is personal and approachable. The most common word describing worship is *darshan*, literally translated as "seeing and being seen by God." My own rich experiences in India during the past three decades have led me to a deep understanding of this process of "meeting God." In writing *Meeting God*, I attempted to convey the transformative intensity of worship in India as it evokes the heart as well as the mind, and as it involves the active use of all the senses. Although the work is based on field research and scholarship, I chose to focus my descriptions of daily and seasonal devotions more upon the way they impact individual Hindu devotees than upon scriptural or textual resources.

Libraries are filled with books that richly describe the Hindu religious canon, but there are few that attempt to give a sense of the many ways that this religion permeates the daily lives of



Ambua, Dhar District, Madhya Pradesh: (Above) The sinuous lateral roots of an ancient pipal tree wind around a large upright stone that has been daubed with vermillion to represent the Goddess. Beneath the tree are terracotta horses given as part of pujas in gratitude for the beneficence of the Goddess.

Alappuzha District, Kerala: (Left) Flame signals the presence of the Divine in our lives. Women in the village of Nadakkaval have created arati in the halves of coconuts placed in trays of flowers. They proffer these offerings to their beloved Deity as She passes in procession right by their homes.

the people of India. Hinduism demands the active participation of all the senses.

I purposely simplified and condensed an extremely complex and diverse religion in order to clearly convey its commonalities. In doing so I hoped not to offend by generalizations but to encourage the reader to delve further into Hinduism and the cultures of India. *Meeting God* is intended to portray forms of spirituality that have distinctly evolved in the Indian subcontinent but that nevertheless may resonate in the lives of those of us living in other countries. Hinduism is a religion of strength, vitality, innovation, and balance. By opening our hearts and minds to its messages, we can enrich our own lives.



Roopan Devi Oevara, Udaipur District, Rajasthan: (Left) Sacred trees are as varied as the communities they represent. Beneath this ancient tree, a large wooden sculpture is carved with multiple images of the Goddess Roopan Devi and with animals associated with Her protection.

Kushinagar, Deoria District, Uttar Pradesh: (Below) This small village shrine contains no image of a Deity. Instead, the simple iron trishula (trident) and the cement pinda (cone) represent the Goddess Kali-Ma. The terracotta elephant, a gift from a grateful devotee, is believed to become a real mount for the Goddess in the spirit world for Her nightly battles against evil.



STEPHEN P. HUYLER

Hindu Heritage Endowment

ANSWERED PRAYERS AND DIETARY CHANGE INSPIRE DR. NIGEL SIVA'S TWO ENDOWMENT FUNDS

Pray to God. Do no harm. For Maryland mathematician Dr. Nigel Subramaniam Siva, these sentences emerge like spiritual lessons from two stories that mark turning points in his life.

Unemployed in 1983 in the city of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, he spent months painting sacred images in oil on the interior walls of the city's Kali Temple while praying for work and a new life. He had written to Prof. Robert F. Dressler in the USA where he felt his grasp of higher math would make him useful to those studying important but esoteric subjects—crystal growth in microgravity and atmospheric density currents, for example. He had heard nothing back.

And then one day a devotee at the temple said to him, "Kali has just told me that within the next ten days you will get a job." Nigel's astonishment from that pronouncement of 26 years ago still fresh in his voice, he exclaimed, "I had never told him or anyone else that I was looking for a job in America! And within ten days, I got a letter from Prof. Dressler with a job offer at the George Washington University."

This answered prayer inspired him years later to create the Jaffna Kannathidu Kali Kovil Endowment through Hindu Heritage Endowment (HHE). The fund supports the Kali temple where the prescient devotee foresaw his new career. The fund pays for the temple's electricity and the oil for its lamps. He hopes someday the principal will be large enough that its income can also cover puja supplies. For the moment, he says, his gift keeps the light of his gratitude glowing in that sacred space where he experienced the power of prayer.

With his newfound career came travel in a new country and culture. "In the US, I was no longer practicing the Hindu tradition of vegetarianism," he said. In 1999 he became vegetarian once again. "As a Hindu, I feel that one should do no harm," he explained. He saw vegetarianism as a way of extending this belief to the animal kingdom. More than a dietary choice, it symbolizes his commitment "to do no injury to any living things or the environment." This second turning point he celebrated by starting a second fund at HHE, The Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment. The fund provides for the care, feeding and medical needs of Kauai Hindu Monastery's cows. The fund was a way to mitigate the karma resulting from a meat-eating past, he said. "But far more important is that the fund perpetuates a very good thing. At the Kauai monastery, dairy products are used in rituals and to nourish the monks, who in turn teach Hinduism all around the world." He views the Cows Fund as a small gift with a great effect.

Dr. Siva likes the perpetual nature of endowment funds that use income only while preserving principal. He encourages others to consider establishing their own permanent funds at HHE. "When you do good things, goodness comes back to you," he observed. While his funds relate to his own life's journey, "they are not only for me. They go beyond selfishness. They are for others, and they are forever."



Nigel Siva, his wife Impah and son Ragavan befriend Deepthi who is expecting her first calf

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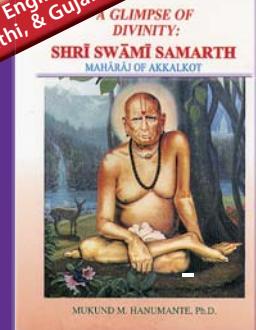
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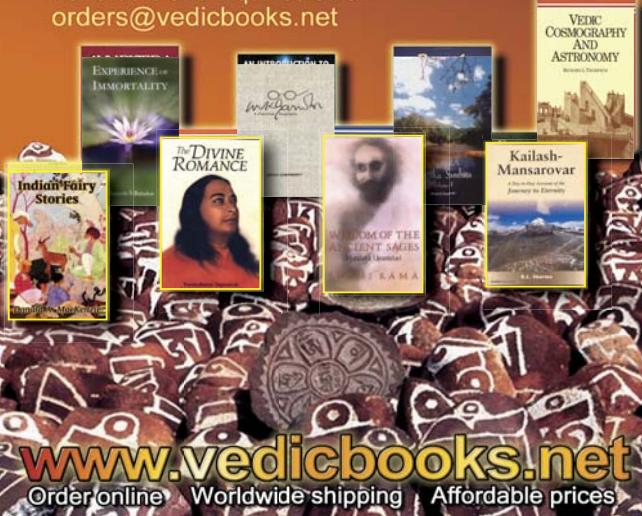
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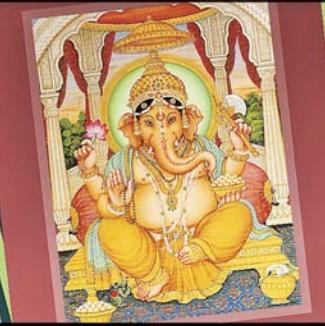
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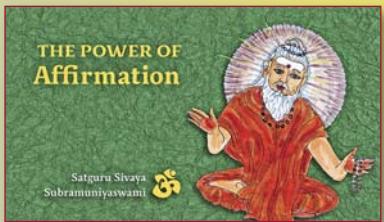
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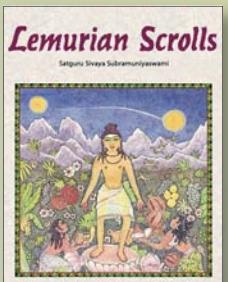
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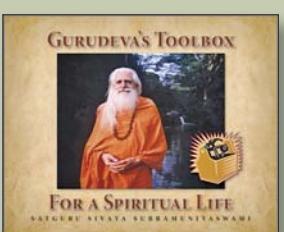
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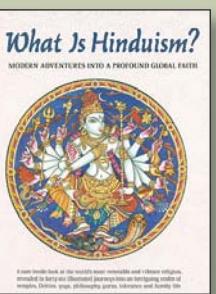
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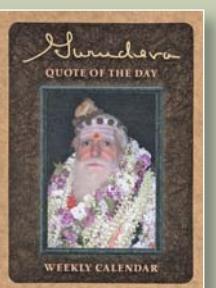
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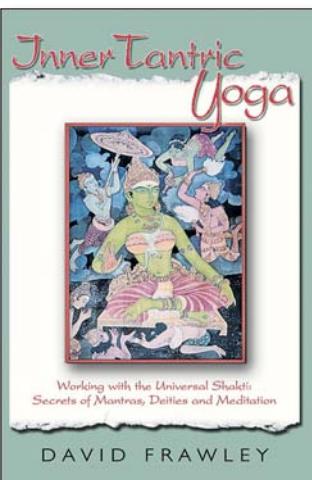
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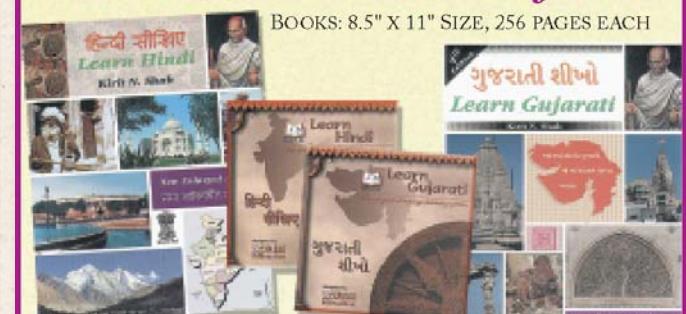
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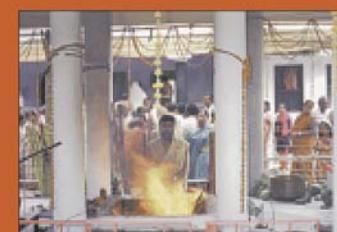
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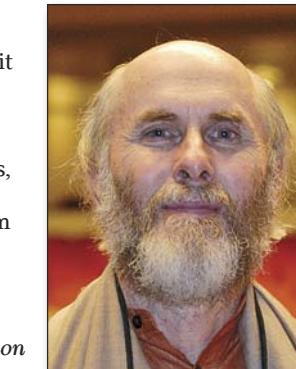
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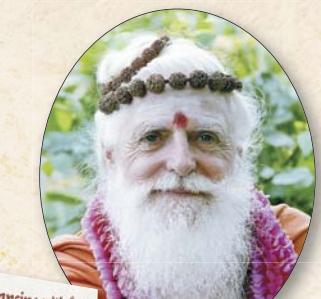
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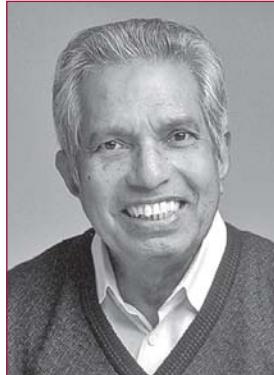
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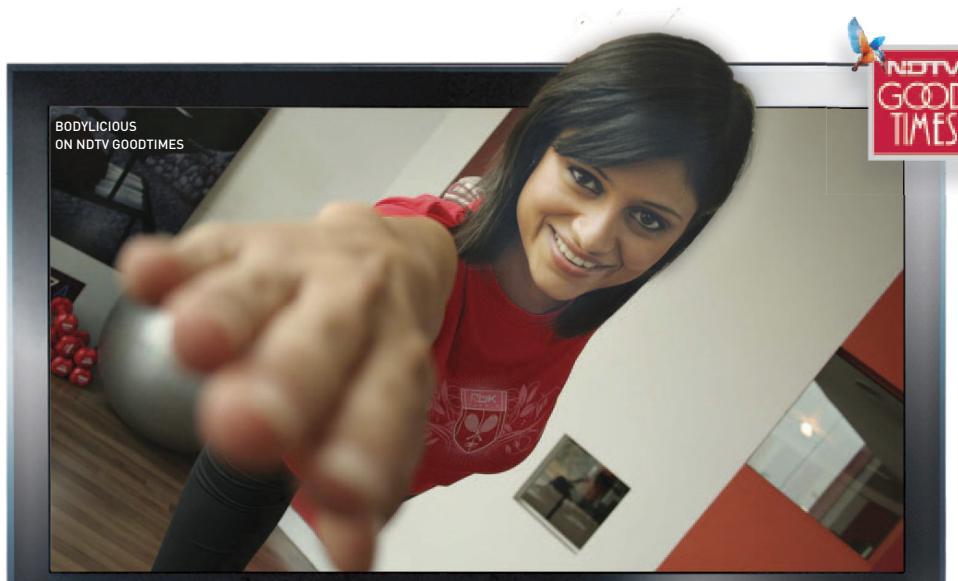
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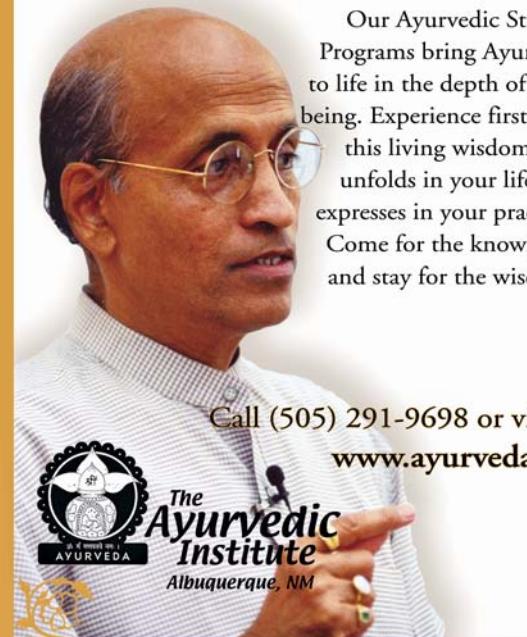


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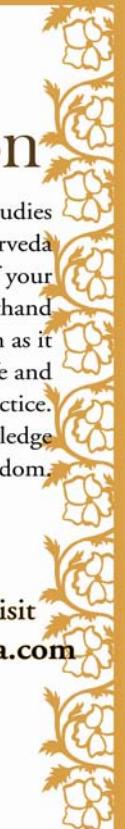


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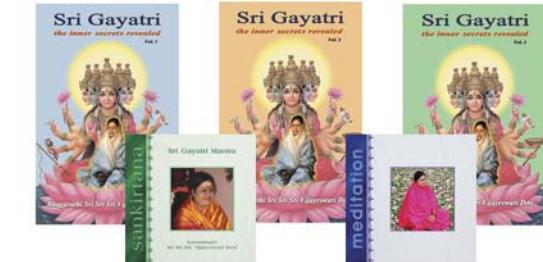


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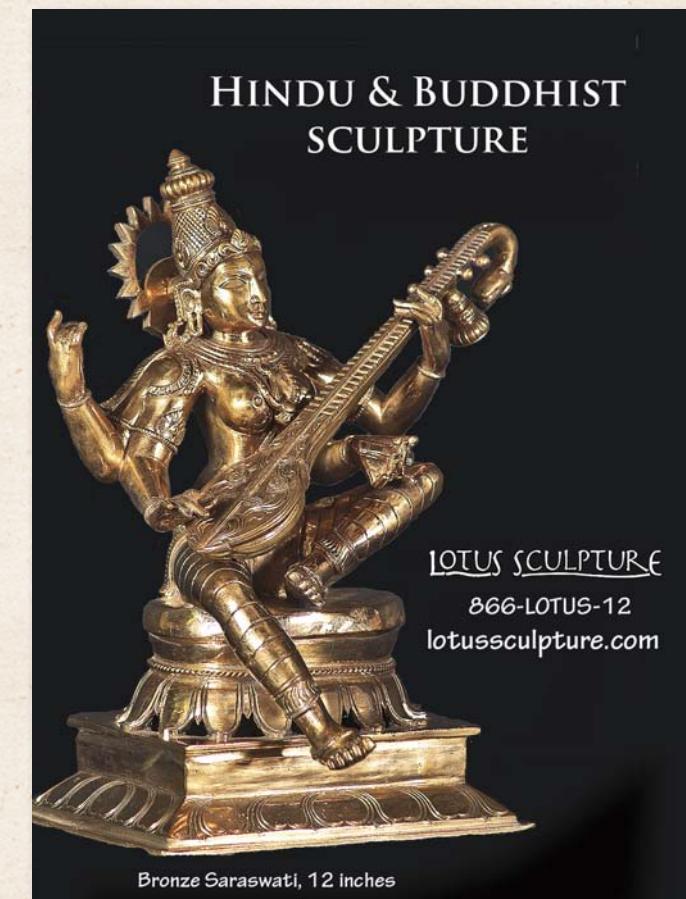
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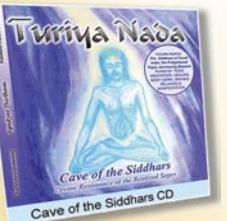
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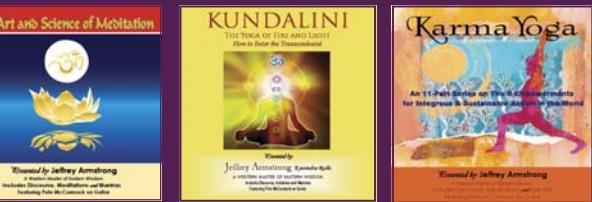
Tapasyogi Kalathi Adiyan Aadi Nandhi is from the lineage of Siddhar Bhoganathar. He was initiated into the Siva Siddhars path by his guru through a death experience more than 20 years ago. Nandhi then journeyed through the wilderness of South India, meditating in caves and doing intense pilgrimages to ancient spiritual centers with several enlightened masters. • Nandhi's yoga is based on sadhana marga, putting practice and self-transformation above mere intellect. He founded the Ariven Community, a non-profit that creates global sanctuaries for retired cows and bulls that would otherwise be slaughtered and organic farms that give 50% of their vegetarian produce to the poor. All are invited to participate: www.ariven.org • He teaches Turiya Yoga, the mystical spiritual hatha yoga in Los Angeles: www.nandhi.com



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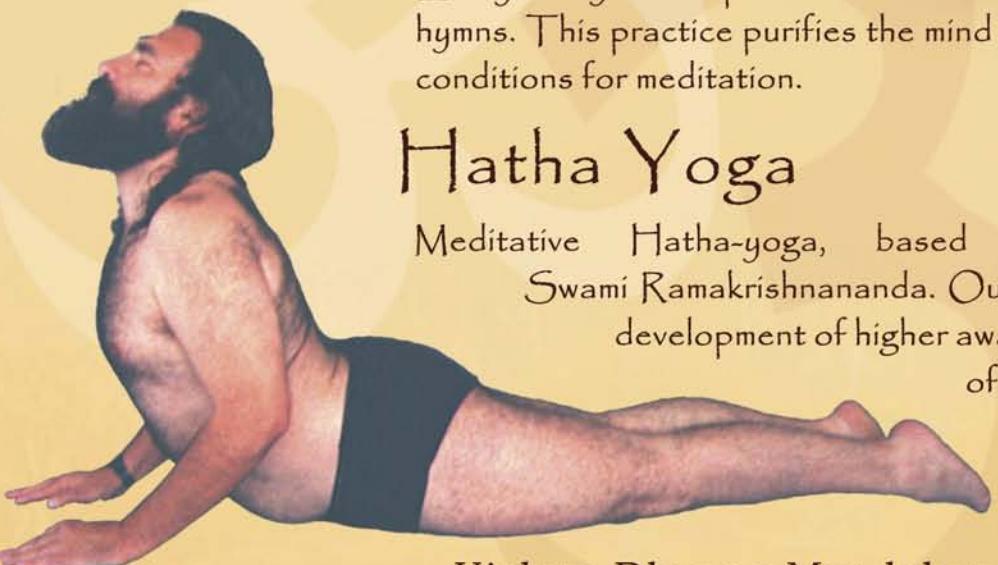
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DIGITAL DHARMA

SOCIAL MEDIA

What Do Facebook and Twitter Have to Do With Hinduism?

BY MADHURI SHEKAR, LOS ANGELES

ARE YOU ON FACEBOOK? DO YOU TWEET about your day? Do you 'Digg' the latest viral YouTube sensation? If you don't, you're missing out on the latest, most significant trend on the Internet—social media.



Stanford University's Facebook page is one of many institutional models for Hindu organizations. The amazing array of comments, photos, postings, video and up-to-the minute info on events could bring new life to your Hindu organization

Social media employs a gamut of different technologies and services, providing the ability to share content instantly with friends and the general web audience. Where traditional media was based around the one-way transmission of information and entertainment, social media is geared around two-way dialogue, collaboration, user-generated content and immediate communication.

Social media is a powerful force for breaking down barriers between people across the world, connecting different cultures and nations in far off places. Hindu organizations can use these new tools to promote Sanatana Dharma. Let's see how with a look at today's two most popular—Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook

Facebook is the web's biggest social networking sensation, with over 200 million active users. While it is primarily used for personal purposes—for networking and catching up with friends and family—Facebook also allows businesses and organizations to set up fan pages to communicate with their customers, followers and fans. Major brands, such as Starbucks, Coca Cola, Adidas and others, use Facebook to connect personally with their consumers in a variety of ways.

Religious organizations have also begun using Facebook to stay in touch with their followers. At the Kauai Hindu Monastery's Facebook page, (www.facebook.com/KauaiHinduMonastery) for instance, you can keep abreast of daily news, engage in discussions with fellow devotees, share your thoughts, opinions and experiences on the "Wall," view photographs and

videos of the ongoing Iraivan Temple project, and instantly share content with your entire group of friends.

Twitter

You've heard of blogging—now there's microblogging, with Twitter riding the crest of the wave. Twitter allows you to post your thoughts in 140 characters or less for your friends (and the world) to see. This online mass-texting service is the latest addicting social networking phenomenon.

While Twitter may seem frivolous at first glance, it can be a critical mode of communication. For example, it played a significant role recently in the chaos following the Iranian election, when the government clamped

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down on media and communications, and began expelling international journalists. Meanwhile, activists on the ground frantically tweeted updates about the situation, often with compelling images and videos of the citizen protests that were being violently suppressed. With traditional media sources stifled, journalists around the world began relying on citizen reports streamed through Twitter to cover the hot situation in Iran.

Aside from its value as a tool of social and political movements, Twitter is also being used by religious organizations and leaders to communicate with their followers. Devotees of Mata Amritanandamayi, "The Hugging Saint," can follow her travels around the world through her Twitter account (@amritapuri), which provides real-time updates and descriptions of her darshans and tours.



The Hinduism Today editorial team gets a steady stream of news tips that they are now posting on Twitter

Comment, Like, Share.

The real genius of social media is in its simplicity. Most social media platforms are designed for ease of use, allowing you to instantly share interesting content and connect with multiple people and personalities in a short span of time. As the Internet evolves into a shared space for collaboration, consensus and citizen activism, it is important to join the conversation and not get left behind. Follow your favorite spiritual magazine at twitter.com/HinduismToday.